



CONNECTICUT
VETERANS
LEGAL
CENTER



Justice for All Who Served
IMPACT REPORT

JULY 1, 2024 - JUNE 30, 2025



OUT IN THE COMMUNITY

We are proud to assist all who served, which sometimes means fighting against stigma related to discharge status, age, race, gender identity, mental illness, drug use, and other common but unspoken barriers that sometimes keep Veterans from getting the help they need. Being out in the community allows us to hear directly from Veterans, helping us understand emerging issues and build meaningful relationships.

This year for the first time, we were grateful for the partnership with the LGBTQ+ Justice & Opportunity Network (administered through the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, CWCSEO). This funding helped us increase our presence in the LGBTQ+ community, building trust and reaching Veterans who are feeling uncertainty under the current federal administration.

All the photos on this page are from community outreach events attended by CVLC staff and board members.



A WORD FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

Reflecting on the past year, it is true that it has been a whirlwind. But, by sticking to what we do best and staying true to our values, Connecticut Veterans Legal Center has only gotten stronger.

I am proud to present the 2024-2025 Annual Report, which gives you just a taste of what we have accomplished. As you will read, we have increased the number of Veterans we are able to serve thanks to our ever-dedicated staff and pro bono attorney partners.

In addition to helping more than 1,800 Veterans navigate their very real day-to-day challenges, we have also continued to invest in research and policy advocacy to understand the root causes of these challenges and build a better environment for our service members and Veterans moving forward.

We have not been completely spared by the chaos of the current funding environment. We are incredibly grateful to all of the foundations, firms, companies, and individuals who continue to stand by our side and keep us going. I hope you will agree your investments have been well worth it—according to a UCONN CCEA study we conducted earlier this year, for every \$1 we receive, Connecticut Veterans receive \$21 in benefit.

As always, I would like to end by thanking the incredible staff and members of the Board of Directors. Your steadfast dedication and excellent work changes—and sometimes saves—so many lives. I am so proud of our team.

In service to the Veteran community,



ALISON M. WEIR

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LT. COL., U.S. AIR FORCE (RET.)

OUR MISSION

Our mission to empower, support, and improve the lives of Connecticut Veterans by providing free legal assistance to help them overcome legal barriers to housing, healthcare, income, and recovery.

OUR VISION

Our vision is for all Connecticut Veterans to thrive and contribute to their communities with a sense of self-worth and dignity.

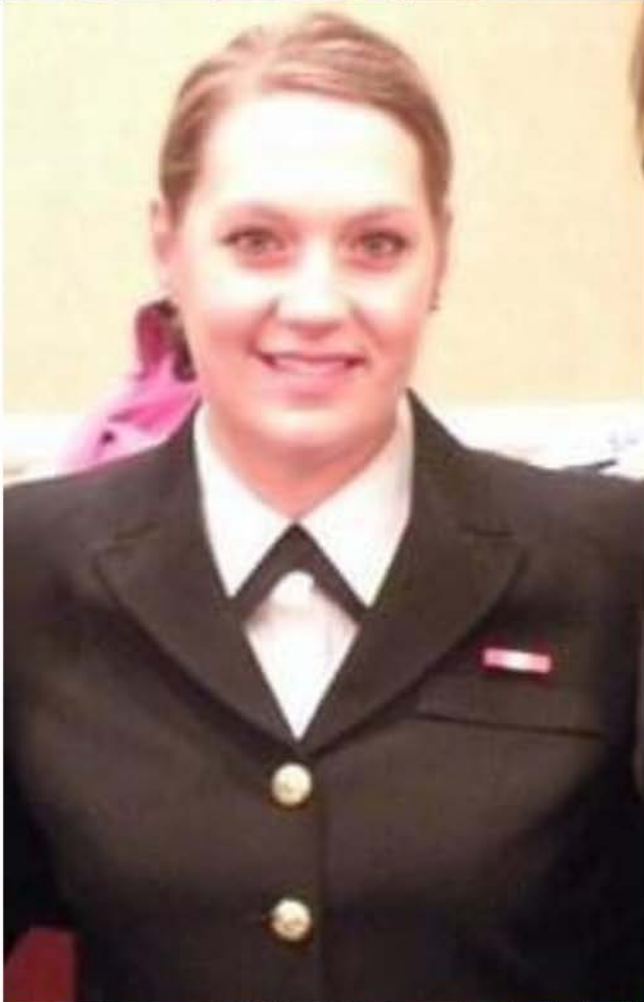
Learn more about our work at
CTVeteransLegal.org

Photo of Alison Weir by Studio DUDA.

COVER PHOTO: U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Joe and wife Kathy. Photo by David Apuzzo.

MEET VETERAN TARA

U.S. NAVY VETERAN



For most of her time in the Navy, Tara did well—she was an officer and nurse in the Navy's emergency services, providing care for her fellow service members who lived on base and those returning from combat.

Unfortunately, after the sudden death of her fiancé, Tara began to struggle with her mental health. Like many others, she began to self-medicate when the healthcare provided by the Navy was insufficient. Ultimately, her behavior led to an administrative discharge.

The Navy recommended separating her with a "General" discharge, but a paperwork error incorrectly included the phrase "Other Than Honorable."

Still, Tara held onto her nursing career and managed to make it on her own for many years. But on the tenth anniversary of her fiancé's death she began to fall into a downward spiral.

When Tara lost her job and home, she decided enough was enough and finally reached out for support. Unfortunately she was still being denied care—her mislabeled DD-214 led to her getting rejected again-and-again. In between her constant returns to the VA with newly requested files and documents, she started drinking. *"It was disastrous,"* she recalls. *"I was screaming and begging for help."*

Tara's first contact with CVLC was in a haze, but attorney Alden Pinkham was able to stay in contact with her through her clinician. Alden was the one who finally pointed out the issue in Tara's DD-214. For Tara, meeting CVLC was a serendipitous moment. She reflects, *"I honestly don't remember [how I got in touch] but I did, somehow."*

After years and years of fighting red-tape at the VA, her record was corrected in 2024. Tara could start over.

Read more of her story at

ctveteranslegal.org/meet-navy-veteran-tara

MEET MR. HOFFMAN

U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN

Name changed to protect the confidentiality of client.

No one should be penalized for fleeing domestic violence, but that is exactly what happened to disabled U.S. Marine Veteran Mr. Hoffmann. He was finally ready to get help and escape his abuser, who lived in the same apartment complex, telling his landlord he would be leaving and getting permission from the property management. It should have ended there. He had done all the “right” things, including securing a protective order against his assailant and getting permission from the property management team. Instead, when Mr. Hoffmann returned to the apartment complex months later looking to rent a new place to call home, he was shocked to discover that the management company had pursued an eviction against him—and won. Mr. Hoffmann now had an eviction on his record and over \$10,000 worth of debt owed.

This was a clear injustice and direct affront to Mr. Hoffmann’s civil rights, enshrined in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Connecticut state law.

Mr. Hoffmann found us through his VA clinician. With HUD’s support staff attorney Tucker McWeeney brought the issue straight to the CHRO (Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities), where he studiously outlined the clear facts of the case on his client, Mr. Hoffmann’s, behalf. By the end of the hearing, not only were we able to successfully remove the debt that had been levied against this veteran we were also successful in securing thousands of dollars in damages against the property management company. Mr. Hoffmann now has the funds he needs to move from a shelter and into stable, permanent housing. It also afforded him the dignity of having his claim heard and believed—something we all have the right to.

Paralegal Cesar Rivera at the VA Community Resource and Referral Center. Photo by David Apuzzo.

CVLC IS A GOOD INVESTMENT

Analyzing seven years of data, the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis found that the economic impact of our services are immense: **for every \$1 invested in the work Connecticut Veteran Legal Center does, Veterans see \$21 in impact.** This outsized impact is thanks to keeping Veterans housed and connecting them with the VA and other public benefits they deserve.

Learn more at ctveteranslegal.org/our-impact.

ANALYZING PARTNER





ADVANCING JUSTICE THROUGH RESEARCH

“ Racism isn’t something that the Army or the military has a monopoly on ... I would just say in the military, because of such a controlled environment and people in leadership roles have such control over you and your career ... the effects of that is amplified because they can prevent you from progressing your career, prevent you from getting any kind of recognition, which can have an effect on you as a person. ”

- **Mr. Turner**, U.S. Army and Air Force Veteran
excerpted from the *Black Veterans’ Insight* report

We can never move forward if we don’t take the time to understand the core issues at the heart of so many Veterans’ struggles. In January 2025, the *Journal of Veterans Studies* (Virginia Tech Publishing) published our most-recent report: ***Black Veterans’ Insight on Racial Disparities in Military Administrative Separations***. This study outlined experiences shared by Black Veterans about their time in service, helping us to identify commonalities to support our clients.

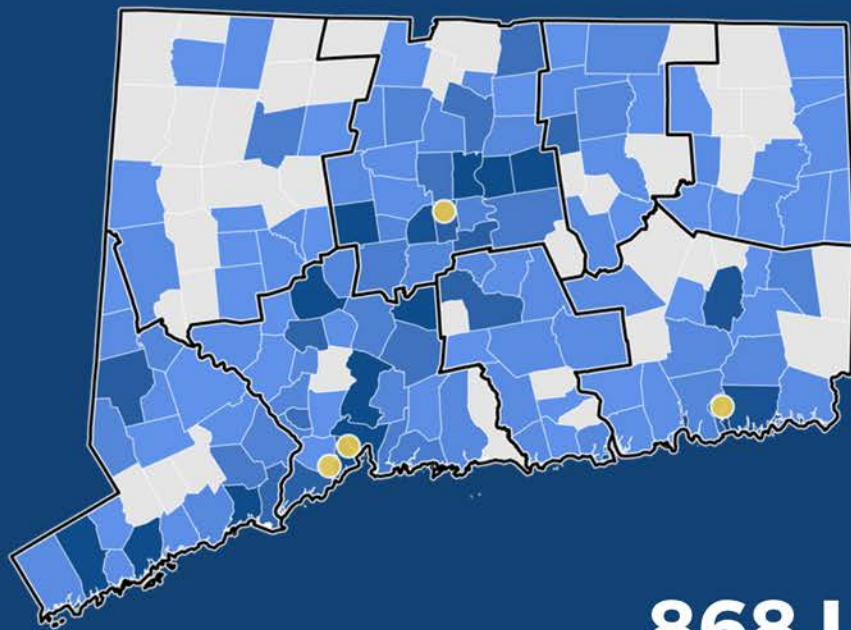
You can read the report for free online at ctveteranslegal.org/reports

Thanks to authors Cara Cancelmo, Devin Brown, Alden Pinkham, and Alison Weir and partners Black Veterans Project and Yale School of Public Health. This study was made possible with support from the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, Fairfield County Community Foundation, and the Bob Woodruff Foundation.

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Stephen. Photo by Joel Callaway.

CVLC SERVED MORE THAN 1,800 VETERANS IN THE LAST YEAR

CLVC'S IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS



In 2024-2025, we helped Veterans living in every corner of Connecticut and across the state as part of our commitment to fight for all who served.

Darker colors represent greater population density of clients by municipality. Yellow dots represent our four client-facing locations.

868 LEGAL CASES

OUTCOMES

\$3.2MM

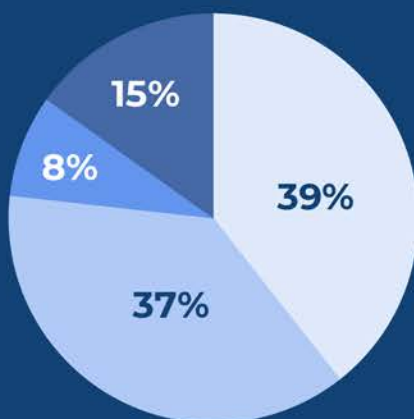
In lump sum awards to Veterans and their families

\$30MM

In anticipated lifetime income from VA income benefits

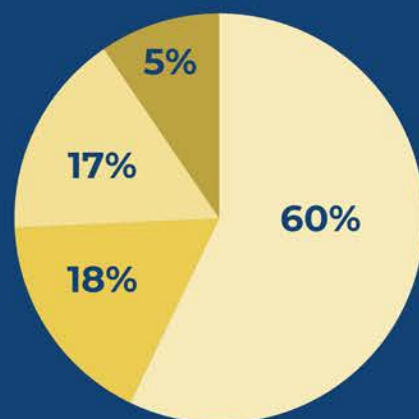
80%

Positive legal outcomes in housing cases



LEGAL CASE BY TYPE

39% VA Benefits
37% Housing Related
8% Discharge Upgrades
15% Other Civil Legal Issues



CASE PLAN BY TYPE

60% Full Representation
18% Legal Advice
17% Pro Bono Referral
5% Pro Se Assistance

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Thank you to our staff data analyst **Alex McCulloch** for diligently tracking and analyzing this information so we are able to accurately report it.

Data is based on our client and case data, July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025.



BUILDING THE FUTURE

THE CHRISTY FISHER LEGAL FELLOWSHIP

In February 2025, Christy Fisher retired after more than 11 years of service to Veterans at CVLC and well over 25 years in the legal aid field. In honor of Christy's lifetime commitment to access to justice for all and her dedication to providing mentorship to young attorneys, we created the **Christy Fisher Legal Fellowship**. This paid fellowship will allow a 2L or 3L student to develop their skills within our robust medical-legal partnership model.

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center will host our first Fisher Fellow in summer 2026.

Learn more about the Christy Fisher Legal Fellowship at ctveteranslegal.org/fisherfellowship

CHRISTY FISHER LEGAL FELLOWSHIP FOUNDERS CIRCLE

Peggy Britt and Louis King
Susan Bryson and Laurence Nadel
Joseph J. Cherico
Sergio Giuliano
Mark A. Healey, Esq.

Harold Hongju Koh & Mary-Christy Fisher
Howard Koh MD MPH and Claudia Arrigg MD
Steve Koh
John J. Shay, Jr.

NURTURING NEXT GENERATION

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR 2024-2025 INTERNS

The work of Connecticut Veterans Legal Center would not be possible without the incredible work of our interns and volunteers.

- Sammi Bray, Discharge Upgrades Intern
- Nicolas Ciminiello, Legal Intern VA Benefits
- Wyatt Hudson, Legal Intern Discharge Upgrades
- Melina Joseph, Research Intern*
- Anne Lee, Marketing Intern
- Landon McKinney, Legal Intern Pro Bono Services
- Kelly Ray Gibson, Legal Intern Discharge Upgrades
- Leila Ruser, Screening & Referral Intern
- Jada Washington, Marketing Intern

*not photographed



TOP: Mary-Christy "Christy" Fisher. Photo by David Apuzzo.
BOTTOM: CVLC Interns, photos in order as listed.

PRO BONO ATTORNEY NETWORK

“*Making a meaningful difference in the lives of those who have served our country is both an honor and a deeply rewarding experience.*”

- **Jessica D. Bowman**, *McCarter & English LLP Attorney*



Our network of attorneys, firms, and corporations who provide pro bono legal services is second-to-none. Pro bono attorneys worked on 144 legal cases in 2024-2025—clients who we may not have been able to help without our partner.

Whether it is stepping in to remove a debt that is preventing a Veteran from getting their car out of the tow lot or providing years of comprehensive legal representation in front of the Military Boards, our pro bono attorney partners change Veterans' lives. Thank you.

THANK YOU TO OUR PRO BONO PARTNERS

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FIGHTING FOR ALL WHO SERVED

2024-2025 LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, Connecticut entered into its biennial long session that brought a host of issues to the forefront. Connecticut Veterans Legal Center was there, providing testimony in committee to ensure low-income Veterans are not forgotten. Although some of these issues may seem disconnected from the day-to-day work of our attorneys, each success moves our state forward and makes it easier for all who served to live and thrive.

DISABLED VETERAN PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION

Executive Director and U.S. Air Force Veteran Alison Weir worked closely with the Veteran and Military Affairs Committee as they worked to adjust the language of the bill passed last session to exempt certain Disabled Veterans from property tax. Our goal: ensure this benefit reaches all who it was designed to help, including those with TDIU and surviving families. Ultimately, the State has left the decision to the municipalities, for now—a partial success.

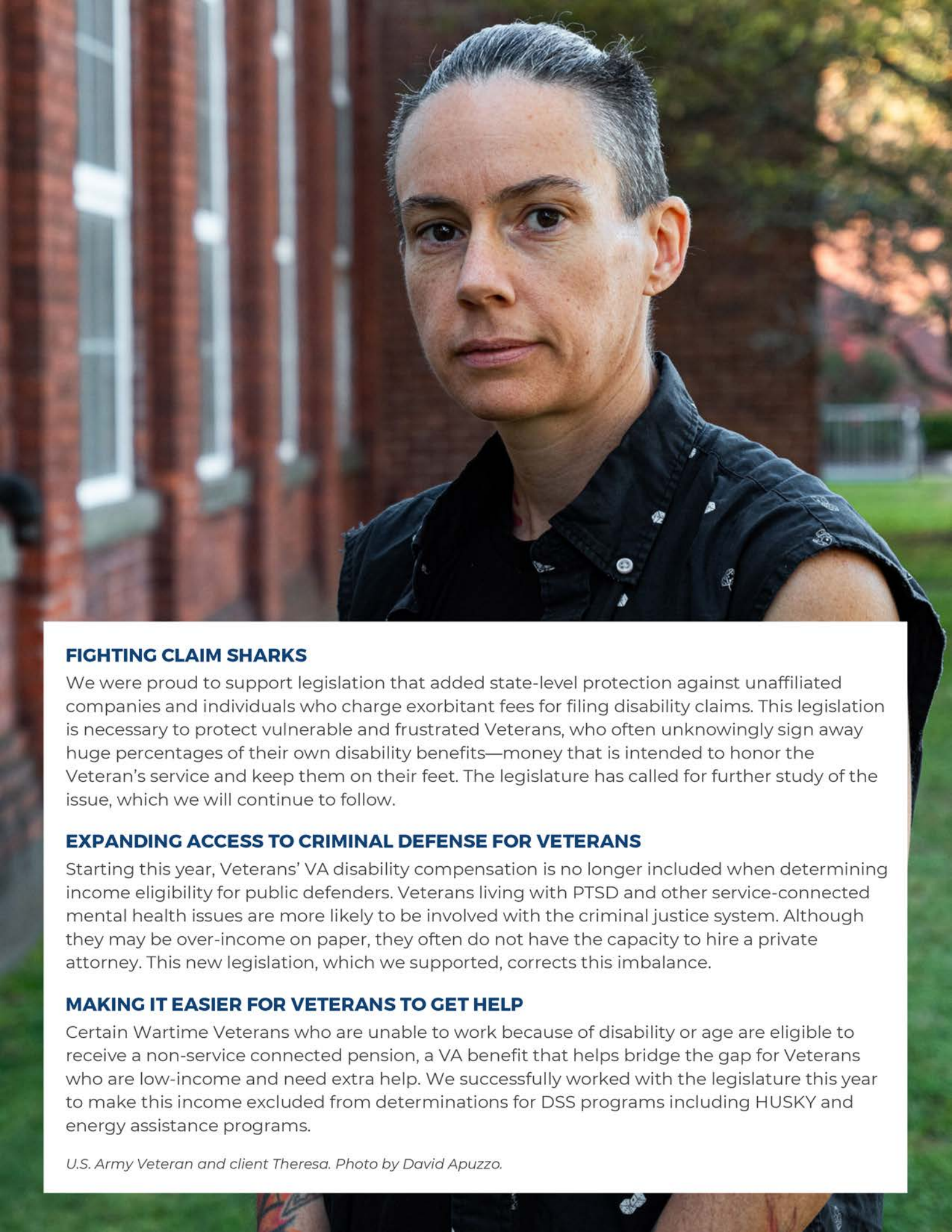
PROTECTING RIGHT TO COUNSEL

Right to Counsel is a landmark legislation that levels the playing field for low-income tenants, including hundreds of Veterans, in eviction proceedings. Originally funded through COVID-era federal funds, we joined our partners and the Connecticut Bar Foundation in advocating for state funding to continue this effective and life-saving program.

CVLC Executive Director Alison M. Weir testifying at the Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee in January 2025.



ALISON WEIR
Executive Director
Connecticut Veterans Legal Center



FIGHTING CLAIM SHARKS

We were proud to support legislation that added state-level protection against unaffiliated companies and individuals who charge exorbitant fees for filing disability claims. This legislation is necessary to protect vulnerable and frustrated Veterans, who often unknowingly sign away huge percentages of their own disability benefits—money that is intended to honor the Veteran's service and keep them on their feet. The legislature has called for further study of the issue, which we will continue to follow.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO CRIMINAL DEFENSE FOR VETERANS

Starting this year, Veterans' VA disability compensation is no longer included when determining income eligibility for public defenders. Veterans living with PTSD and other service-connected mental health issues are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system. Although they may be over-income on paper, they often do not have the capacity to hire a private attorney. This new legislation, which we supported, corrects this imbalance.

MAKING IT EASIER FOR VETERANS TO GET HELP

Certain Wartime Veterans who are unable to work because of disability or age are eligible to receive a non-service connected pension, a VA benefit that helps bridge the gap for Veterans who are low-income and need extra help. We successfully worked with the legislature this year to make this income excluded from determinations for DSS programs including HUSKY and energy assistance programs.

U.S. Army Veteran and client Theresa. Photo by David Apuzzo.



THE RIDE FOR OUR VETS

Since 2012 The Ride for Our Vets has taken our Riders across Connecticut, and sometimes into New York—raising well over \$1 million.

In June 2025, more than 100 Riders joined together to help us **raise more than \$150,000** in support of Connecticut Veterans Legal Center's life-saving services. Thank you to all of our Riders, their donors, and our sponsors for making 2025 one of our most successful events ever!

Learn about the Ride for Our vets at ctveteranslegal.org/theride.

2025 Riders with Senator Richard Blumenthal at the start line at Half Full Brewery in Stamford. Photo by Joel Callaway. See more photos at ctveteranslegal.org.

UNDERWRITING SPONSOR



THANK YOU!

TO ALL OUR DONORS WHO UNDERWRITE OUR WORK AND SUPPORT OUR MISSION

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CAPTAIN CELINE A. FINN LEGACY SOCIETY

SECURING THE FUTURE OF CONNECTICUT VETERANS LEGAL CENTER

Planned giving is a way to make the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center a part of your lasting legacy.

In 2022, we were humbled to establish our Legacy Society with the receipt of our first planned gift from the estate of **U.S. Navy Captain Celine A. Finn**. She was an member of the Navy Nurse Corps for 28 years, serving with devotion and great skill. She was well loved by family, friends, and her fellow sailors. When she passed, we were honored to be among the beneficiaries of her estate and thankful for her family's support.

Want to talk to CVLC about your legacy gift? Contact Shannon Mykins at smykins@ctveteranslegal.org.

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GIFTS IN HONOR

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Quỳnh Trương

In honor of CVLC Staff

Cindy Donaldson

In honor of Robert E. Cwiekowski

Judith M. Slisz

In honor of Cindy Donaldson

Anonymous

In honor of Margaret Donovan

Rosendo Garza and
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 Barry Nalebuff and Helen Kauder

In honor of all of my Family who are Veterans

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In honor of Morgan Gray

Louise Manzi-Deptula

In honor of MAJ Jacqueline Harris

Steve McCulloch

In honor of Immigrant Veterans

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In honor of Kevin Lenehan

Rosendo Garza and
 Juliana Garcia-Urbe
 Margaret Middleton

In honor of Levon

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In honor of Margaret Middleton

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Drew Aquilina

In memory of Ernest Barone

Diana Barone

In memory of Tim Brooks

James Gallego

In memory of Eugene Carolan

Anne Farrell

In memory of Frank and John Cerninara

Steven Paulson

In memory of Fred Cohen

Sue Cohen

In memory of Uncle Gene Dole

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James Dowling-Healey

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In memory of Silver Fox

Daniel Furstenberg

In memory of Joseph Fraser

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In memory of John A Garrett

Mary Garrett

In memory of Albert Ginnetti

The Ginnettis

In memory of Paul Glass

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In memory of Robert Joseph Sr

JJ Wassmuth

In memory of Sqn. Ldr.

Kamlakar Kanitkar

Malavika Ranade

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In memory of Marty Payson

Jackie and Andrew Jaeger

In memory of Ed and Walter Plaut

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Andrew Bottinick

In memory of Chuck Saldarini

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Mike Saltis

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continued from previous page

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Joshua Barker
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Connor Blenke
Sergii Bludov
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Bogdan Bracea
Dan Broderick
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*Learn more about the Ride for Our Vets
at ctveteranslegal.org/theride.*

GRANTS & CONTRACTS

Agency on Aging of South Central
Connecticut
Anonymous Foundation
Bob Woodruff Foundation
Bodenwein Public Benevolent
Foundation
Columbus House Inc
The Community Foundation for
Greater New Haven
Community Foundation of
Middlesex County
Community Renewal Team, Inc.
Connecticut Bar Foundation
Connecticut Fair Housing Center
Ensworth Charitable Foundation
ES Veterans Association Inc.
Fairfield County's Community
Foundation, Inc.
Frank Loomis Palmer Fund
George A. & Grace L. Long
Foundation
J. Walton Bissell Foundation, Inc
JANA Foundation Inc.
The LGBTQ+ Justice & Opportunity
Network
Liberty Bank Foundation
NewAlliance Foundation
North Central Area Agency on
Aging
The Right to Counsel Program,
administered by Connecticut Bar
Foundation
Town Fair Tire Foundation, Inc
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
William and Alice Mortensen
Foundation
The WorkPlace

BUSINESS SUPPORTERS

Anonymous
American Red Cross, CT & RI Region
Association of United States Army,
CT Chapter
Athletic Brewing Company
AVANGRID
AVANGRID, AVANVets Employee
Resource Group
BarkBox
Ben & Jerry's
Berkowitz and Hanna, LLC
Black Hog Brewing Company
BNP Paribas
Branford Jewelers
Brenner, Saltzman & Wallman LLP
Bruce C Angeli LLC
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CME Group Inc.
Cold Spring Brook Farm
Columbus House Inc
Deloitte LLP
East Haven and Ridgefield Building
Supply
Finn Dixon & Herling LLP
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Jewish War Veterans
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Gaylord Specialty Healthcare
George W. Crawford Black Bar
Association, Inc.

GLMX Technologies, LLC
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Guggenheim Securities, LLC
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Ideas
JP Morgan Chase & Co.
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National Veterans Council for Legal
Redress, Inc
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Point72
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Supervising Attorney, Civil-Legal Unit Darren Pruslow speaking with Board Member and former client U.S. Navy Veteran John Rios at the VA Community Resource and Referral Center. Photo by Desirea Stott-Rodgers.



“ [CVLC] did so much more than just provide expert legal assistance—
he was extremely patient, caring and emotionally supportive of
them and even went to their apartment to visit with them in person. ”

- **Child of CVLC Client**, a U.S. Army Veteran

WARRIOR CLASS IN CRISIS:

BRIDGING THE MILITARY-CIVILIAN GAP TO SERVE TODAY'S VETERANS

Each year at Saluting Service, Connecticut Veterans Legal Center brings the community together to honor those who have gone above-and-beyond to improve the lives of Connecticut's Veterans and explore issues that are important to our Veteran and legal communities.

In 2024, we were thrilled to welcome more than 170 people to the Canal Dock Boathouse for an incredible evening. The night was headlined by U.S. Marine Corps Veteran and author of *Bravo Company*, **Ben Kesling**. Ben spoke about the critical issue of the military-civilian cultural divide in America and explored how we can bridge that gap and rebuild trust.

2025 HONOREES:

Pro Bono Partnership Award: **Suisman Shapiro, Attorneys-at-Law**

Founders Award: **Nikki Kelsey**

Founders Award, Special Recognition: **Kevin Lenahan**

Learn about Saluting Service at ctveteranslegal.org/salutingservice.

PHOTO: Photos from the 15th Annual Saluting Service. Photos by Isabel Chenoweth. See more photos at ctveteranslegal.org.





CONNECTICUT
VETERANS
LEGAL
CENTER



SUPPORT OUR MISSION

to empower, support, and improve the lives of Connecticut Veterans by providing free legal assistance to help them overcome legal barriers to housing, healthcare, income, and recovery.

U. S. Army Veteran and CVLC Client April. Photo by Desirea Stott-Rodgers.



“Three years in, and I remain in awe of the skill, dedication, and compassion the CVLC team brings to their work, ensuring that our Veterans receive the care and help they need.”

- **Alison M. Weir**, Executive Director

PHOTO: Connecticut Veterans Legal Center staff portrait taken in September 2025. Photo by David Apuzzo.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Janice Wolf

Both the board and staff lists above are as of June 30, 2025. In addition to the staff and board listed, throughout the fiscal year our staff included Felix Chaoulideer, Christy Fisher, Karen Gargamelli-McCreight, Jordan Lownsdale, and Cesar Rivera and our board included Kiana Makris. While they are no longer directly affiliated with Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, their contributions during the 2024-2025 fiscal year were tremendous.

To see the most current staff and board lists and to read their bios, please visit ctveteranslegal.org.

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