

Veterans Committee Meeting Minutes - 6/15/23

In attendance: Steve Connor, Veterans Services, Shaundell Diaz, Three County CoC Gumersindo Gomez, Bilingual Center, Three County CoC, Mike Hagmaier, Soldier On, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Uri Strauss, Community Legal Aid, Kate Sweetster-Owens, VA, Sue White, VA

Three County CoC Update:

Veterans coordinated entry committee continues to meet monthly.
Heads-up on upcoming trainings

- Community Legal Aid Info Session - June 22 - [Register here](#)
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation Training July 13 th - [Register here](#)
- The CoC will also be providing a training on assessing veterans for coordinated entry on June 30 - contact Shaundell to learn more or attend at sdiaz@communityaction.us (and if you want to attend CoC veterans meetings

Community Legal Aid:

- expanding veterans legal work in Hampden County to assist veterans with a range of services; also a Worcester expansion, which together with Uri's work in Hampshire County means a significant increase in veteran representation
- See below for more detailed information from Uri Strauss, CLA attorney

Bilingual Veterans Center:

- Veterans Fathers day Breakfast 6/17 at the Greek Cultural Center of Springfield, 8 am - 10 am
- vacancies at transitional housing - \$375/month, 2 year residency, veteran must reside in Springfield
- Has resources to assist Springfield area veterans to help pay back utilities - call Gumersindo Gomez at 413-731-0194

Soldier On:

- Transitional housing numbers are increasing; women's program almost full
- DVS outreach grant - transportation services have increased significantly
- expanding into Worcester County - Veterans Inc is no longer providing per diem beds and Soldier On is filling the void - searching for real estate

Veterans Services:

- noted significant increase in elderly veterans facing housing crises (dementia and other needs) - group had a good brainstorm on assistance

VA:

- creating new outreach team for western and central mass; coordinating with existing outreach - first time the VA has put its own resources into outreach
- focusing more intensively on elderly veterans' housing and other needs - a rising issue - hired a geriatric social worker

Other news:

- The 3 County CoC is organizing a summer Point in Time Count. Everyone is aware.
- DHCD is now elevated to the new Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities with a new Housing Secretary Ed Augustus
- The FY24 budget is almost final with significant increases in some housing/homelessness areas (and still not enough in the face of the need). The group discussed the challenge of earmarks (which many vet programs depend upon). Hopefully, the new Housing Secretary will be able to assist with creating more permanent line-items with these programs that provide vital housing services.

Next meeting date: Thursday, 9/21, 10 am

Info from CLA Attorney Uri Strauss regarding the legal assistance resources available to veterans:

- I can take referrals from staff at the Leeds VA Medical Center (if this is you and we have not connected about forms and protocols, please reach out to me).
- I can also conduct intakes with anyone who comes to my office hours at the Leeds VA, Customer Care Suite on Wednesdays between 1:15 and 4.
- Any veteran (and any member of the public) can call Community Legal Aid's intake line at 855-252-5342. We have live screeners on the line every weekday morning, except Wednesdays, when intake is open in the afternoon. Veterans can also leave a message, or fill out an online intake at <https://communitylegal.org/get-help/>
- I cannot take cold calls from veterans. Anyone who works with veterans can reach out to me directly with any questions: 413-686-9027, ustrauss@cla-ma.org

If you are referring someone and it makes sense for you to do so, please set the following expectations:

1. I work for Community Legal Aid, which is an independent nonprofit organization and not part of the (VA/VSO/Soldier On/whoever)

2. A referral does not mean automatic acceptance. We can't accept all applicants and don't practice every type of law. But we are often able to refer ineligible applicants to other sources of legal assistance.

Eligibility and priorities: CLA primarily represents low-income clients (up to 125% of the federal poverty guidelines, or 200% if a hardship factor is identified). Other eligibility categories include elder (over 60) and victim of crime. Veteran status is a priority category, but not an eligibility category, so a veteran would still need to qualify as low-income, elderly or some other eligible category.