

Capital Area Veterans Legal Services Collaborative



680 Rhode Island Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002 | 202.832.6577 | www.nlsp.org

Collaborative Members

A diverse group of legal services providers, law firms, agencies and other stakeholders:

- ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty
- Arent Fox LLP
- Bread for the City
- Catholic Charities Legal Network
- Community Solutions
- DC VAMC
- DC Bar Pro Bono Program
- DC Office of Veterans Affairs
- Friendship Place – Veterans First
- Georgetown University Law Center’s Veterans Experiential Learning Project
- Homeless Persons Representation Project
- Legal Aid Society of DC
- Legal Counsel for the Elderly
- Lieberman & Mark
- National Veterans Legal Services Program
- Neighborhood Legal Services Program (“NLSP”)
- Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
- William S. Abell Foundation
- Wright & Talisman
- Yellow Ribbon Fund



Collaborative Mission Statement

- Mission statement:

The mission of the Capital Area Veterans Legal Services Collaborative is to provide high quality, free legal services to homeless and other low- and no-income veterans on those civil law issues that are critical to securing fundamental needs, such as health, personal security, income, veterans and other public benefits, access to employment and discharge upgrades, in a coordinated, effective and maximally accessible way.



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What Brought Us Together?

- Low-income veterans are a particularly underserved segment of the region's low income populations.
- Although free civil legal services are available to low-income veterans, legal aid programs are not seeing veterans in proportion to their population or known needs.
- Access to free legal services could alleviate seriously destabilizing problems: inadequate housing or homelessness, crushing child support obligations, loss of driver's licenses, denial of critical benefits, discharge status problems, predatory consumer practices. . .
- We lack a clear gateway for veterans to receive comprehensive assistance with problems that have a legal dimension – both those specific to veterans and those common to many low-income residents.
- We need a coordinated system of free, civil legal assistance that reaches our low-income veterans.



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Areas of Need

- The Collaborative tentatively determined that the following legal services are likely needed:
 - *Veterans' and other Public Benefits*
 - *Family Law Issues*
 - *Consumer Law Issues*
 - *Employment Issues*
 - *Estate Planning/Wills/Probate*
 - *Housing Law Issues*
 - *Other Issues (including drivers license, sealing of criminal records, professional license denials, other barriers to employment)*



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The statistics. . .

- 6% of DC's 2012 US Census population of 633,427 are veterans.
- Of those 31,288 veterans, 87% are male; 13% are female
- 61.2% are black; 32.2% are white; 4.8% are Hispanic

Age

- 18 – 34: 3,786 (12.1%)
- 35 – 54: 8,322 (26.6%)
- 55 – 64: 6,978 (22.3%)
- 65 – 74: 5,131 (16.4%)
- Over 75: 7,071 (22.6%)

Period of Service

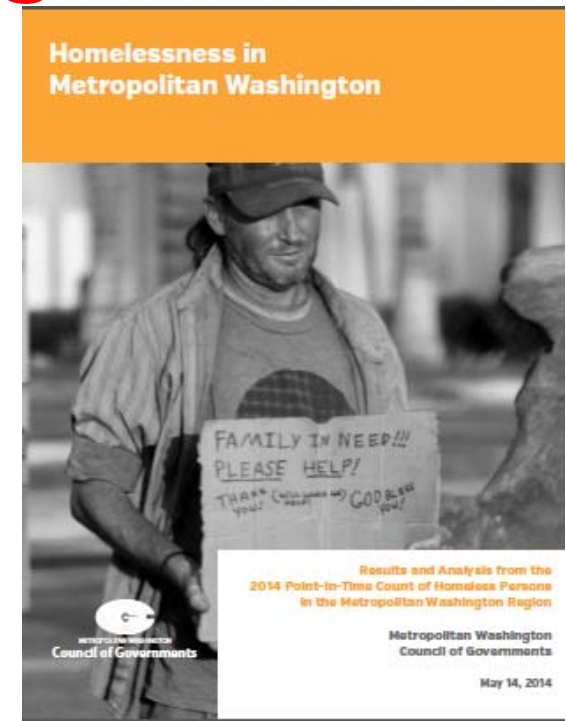
- Peacetime: 5,570 (17.5%)
- Gulf War II (Post 9-11): 5,400 (17.4%)
- Gulf War I (1990 – 2001): 6,700 (21.4%)
- Vietnam Era: 8,400 (27%)
- Korean Conflict: 3,250 (10.4%)
- World War II: 1,970 (6.3%)



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. . .are disturbing

- 10% of veterans live at or below the poverty line
- Veterans represent approximately 5% of the homeless population in the metropolitan Washington region.
- 12% of homeless veterans in the 2014 count were women
- Homeless veterans have a high incidence of substance use, mental illness, cognitive and physical disabilities.
- 41 % of veterans depend on disability benefits (SSDI/SSI/VA disability).



Project start

- Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP) was selected as the host organization for the Project Manager, who would be an NLSP Staff Attorney.
- The William S. Abell Foundation agreed to provide initial funding for the project.
- NLSP hired Eric Hughes as the Project Manager/Staff Attorney.
- Eric started at NLSP on April 6, 2015.



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Neighborhood Legal Services Program

NLSP IS. . .

- A private, non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to low-income DC residents
- Started in 1964
- Grounded in DC's lowest income communities, with offices in Wards 5, 7 and 8
- Staff of 21.5 FTE (14.5 attorneys); 2 additional "loaned associates"
- Practice areas: housing, family, barriers to employment, public benefits, student loan issues



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NLSP Mission

- In partnership with its clients and community stakeholders, NLSP helps DC residents, families and communities eliminate barriers to overcoming poverty and secure justice. Using all available legal and other advocacy tools, NLSP enables underserved DC residents to make their voices heard in the courts and other forums where their rights and protections are at stake, to secure fair and lasting solutions to their problems and to attain their individual, family and community goals.



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Why NLSP?

- NLSP is embedded in low income communities;
- Strong partnerships with community based organizations that serve very low-income residents and the private Bar;
- NLSP conducts mobile outreach designed to reach those who otherwise would not know of or seek legal aid;
- NLSP works with clients who are highly marginalized, including those with disabilities;
- NLSP has expertise addressing likely issues for low-income veterans, including those relating to: housing, child support, rights of custodial and non-custodial parents, domestic violence, public benefits, particularly SSI, and a limited range of consumer issues (primarily student loans); and, with Eric, can address veteran-specific issues
- NLSP is committed to identifying and addressing broad-based issues that emerge from its practice.



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Our Project Manager - Eric Hughes

- Administrator for the Supreme Court of Virginia and William & Mary Law School's Veterans Benefits Clinic
 - Expanded pro bono participation
 - Increased clinic visibility and accessibility in communities
- Experience with: veterans benefits claims; military discharge upgrades; branch-specific Discharge Review Boards
- Veterans Administration Accredited Attorney
- Florida Bar License; waiving into the DC Bar



How to Contact Eric Hughes

- NLSP's Headquarters Office:
 - 680 Rhode Island Avenue NE
(Forman Mills Shopping Center)
 - May be reached either via telephone (direct office number: (202) 269-5105) or via email at ehughes@nlsp.org



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How to Get Help: Intake

- Intake through NLSP's Intake/Brief Services Unit system and procedures.
- Veteran applicants can go through intake via telephone, walk-ins at any of NLSP's three office locations, at selected outreach events, via referrals from other legal aid programs, other sources.
- NLSP is exploring electronic access.
- Regular intake hours: M, W, F 10 – 3; emergencies – anytime; mobile intake – on scheduled basis
- Call 202-832-NLSP



Eligible for Services?

- Income guidelines: generally \leq 200% FPG but flexible.
- Eligible applicants with cases within NLSP practice areas will presumptively be handled by NLSP attorneys.
- The Project Manager will seek pro bono assistance/placement with other programs for veterans whose cases fall outside of NLSP's practice areas, need MD or VA-based assistance or where NLSP has a conflict or lacks resources to handle.



Placements with Pro Bono Attorneys

- The Project Manager will develop a database of available attorneys by subject area and experience levels.
- The Project Manager will facilitate the “hand off” and remain in periodic contact with the receiving attorney.
- Where possible, NLSP attorneys will be available to mentor/consult.
- The Project Manager will develop a reporting mechanism to ensure timely updates from receiving attorneys about placed cases.
- The Collaborative Advisory Group Committee and the Project Manager will develop training to strengthen and expand the cadre of pro bono and other resources.



Community-based Outreach

- Finding out where low-income veterans likely reside or gather.
- Perform intake in connection with outreach, or, where not feasible, obtain “call back” information for follow up with veteran.
- Possible locations:
 - DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center
 - Community Homeless Shelters
 - Soup Kitchens/Food Pantries
 - Public Libraries
 - Veterans Specific Community Organization Facilities (e.g., American Legion, DAV, VFW)

