

Civil Legal Aid for Veterans



Line Item 0321-1600

United States veterans have served our country dutifully in the name of freedom, democracy, and equality. Yet far too many veterans do not have equal access to things as fundamental as health care, stable housing, or financial stability. As a group, veterans experience higher rates of physical and mental health challenges, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance use.

Civil legal aid can solve critical problems for disabled veterans, homeless veterans, and veterans with low incomes by assisting with:

- Financial problems, including bankruptcy and debt
- Family law issues, including child support and custody, divorce, and domestic violence
- Appeals of discharge status
- Housing problems, including eviction and poor conditions
- Access to and denial of benefits, including unemployment insurance, SNAP, MassHealth, Social Security, and state and federal veterans' benefits

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$39,000 per year for a family of four; \$18,825 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.

MLAC's grantees work with other organizations that provide social services and health care to veterans, such as Veterans Affairs Hospitals across the Commonwealth. Through these partnerships, civil legal aid can reach more veterans when and where they need legal assistance.

Legal Aid: A Sound Investment

Nearly **\$100 million** in estimated benefits were provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including **\$83,877,858** in estimated benefits won for clients and **\$16,099,740** in reimbursements and savings obtained for the Commonwealth.



Tristan (names changed for privacy) is a devoted father and veteran who needed help protecting Dustin, his 4-year-old son. Tristan was married but separated from Dustin's mother, Tammy, who struggles with substance abuse. When Tammy filed false allegations against Tristan, he was ordered to leave the home and could not see his son for a full year. He worried about his son due to his wife's drug use and was recommended by a counselor to seek a divorce.

Tristan sought legal help from a civil legal aid organization and was referred to a pro bono family law attorney who took his case. The attorney, an expert in family law matters, helped Tristan not only obtain a divorce but also secure custody of Dustin. Father and son are now living together in stable housing.