



## CFMC Grant Application

# COMPLETE THIS APPLICATION FOR FUNDING REQUESTS FOR THE Community Foundation of Middlesex County Competitive Cycle.

**Instructions:** Complete the application on the website. You may "Save and Continue Later" - the site will email you a link which is active for 30 days. Review instructions document for full details before completing. Complete all questions.

**Section V requires certain documents to be uploaded to the form - see the Application Instructions Document for a list of the required items. All items must be uploaded as PDF Files. The required Project Budget form is available on the website in Word. This document must be submitted as PDF file as well.**

### I. Application Information

**Legal Name of Organization**

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center

**Division or Department Name (if applicable)**

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center

**Are you a 501(c)3 Organization**

Yes

**Other Tax Exempt Entity?**

**EIN #**

27-0963659

If your organization is not a 501(c) 3 tax exempt entity or division/department of a 170(c)1 government agency or religious organization, please contact Thayer Talbott, 860.347.0025, for further information before completing the application.

**Dollar Amount Requested \$**

5,000

**Total Cost associated with request \$**

35492

### Summary Statement

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center is requesting support to provide free legal help to veterans in recovery from homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse. The legal aid will remove barriers to housing, healthcare and income. Our program provides life-changing impacts moving indigent veterans from homelessness to income and housing security, and provides lifetime access to healthcare for their invisible wounds of war.

## **II. Funding Request Information**

### **1. Proposal / Purpose**

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC) provides free legal assistance to indigent veterans recovering from homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse by removing the legal barriers to housing, healthcare, and income. CVLC's free legal aid has a life-changing and lasting impact on the veterans we serve, including the veterans served throughout Middlesex County. These life transforming results moving veterans from poverty to sustainable income, homelessness to safe and affordable housing, and access to lifetime VA healthcare in order to treat their invisible wounds of war.

### **Statement of Need**

Nationally, veterans make up 7% of the general population, but 12% of homeless Americans are veterans. More than 30% of our disabled veterans live in poverty. Indeed, legal and mental health are barriers to economic success.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' annual survey of homeless veterans consistently finds that legal assistance rates in the top five unmet needs. Specifically, in the 2020 Veteran Affairs' CHALENG survey, 7 of the top 10 needs reported by homeless veterans required legal help – including discharge upgrades to get VA benefits and mental health care. Additionally, untreated mental illness increases a veteran's risk for suicide, homelessness, and substance use. In 2020, Connecticut veteran suicide rates increased to 25.1/100,000 compared to 14.6 in overall population. To meet this veteran need, nearly 60% of CVLC's legal caseload relates to helping veterans gain disability benefits, healthcare, and other GI bill benefits.

### **Who We serve**

CVLC is the only legal aid program in Connecticut targeting its free legal services to indigent veterans and their families. CVLC provides legal services to veterans who make less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Fifty-six percent of CVLC clients are homeless or are recovering from recent homelessness. Many of our veterans suffer from PTSD or service-related trauma impacting their ability to heal, maintain stable employment, and successfully transition from service to civilian life. Our clients have difficulty recognizing and communicating legal needs, following up with appointments, and bravely asking for help. Working in teams with their mental health clinicians allows CVLC to successfully serve these most vulnerable veterans.

### **Program & Process**

CVLC works in deep partnership with the VA healthcare system and housing agencies to pair legal representation with emergency support services, social services, and mental health care to successfully move veterans from homelessness to financial and housing security. Through legal representation, CVLC clients are able to stave off imminent eviction to give them time to resolve financial and other legal issues, to receive debt forgiveness for debt that was preventing them from securing housing, or to increase disability or other benefits that will provide them with a sustainable income that will enable them to afford their ongoing housing costs. Clients often have more than one active case at a time. This approach allows CVLC to work with clinicians and volunteer attorneys to stave off immediate impacts, such as eviction or debt collection, while we work to ensure the veteran has sustainable income from social security or VA disability benefits, and has appropriate healthcare. It is not uncommon to find benefit calculations out of date. Once housing and income are stabilized, the veteran can focus on their continued recovery, family, and career. At the close of every case CVLC tracks whether that representation improved the veteran's financial status, housing stability or access to healthcare.

### **Challenges in 2021-2022**

The strength of our medical-legal partnership continues to rise to the challenges created by the COVID pandemic, and now the economic and housing crisis aftermath. There has never been a greater need for ensuring veterans have access to vital health care, are able to secure adequate income, and avoid looming homelessness. As the data suggests above, these social determinants of health that are clearly now life or death for so many low income veterans and their families. Indeed, 18 months of COVID-related social isolation, mental health problems, financial insecurity, and looming eviction notices have increased the need for veterans to access VA healthcare and legal representation.

The federal and state eviction moratoriums have now expired. As CVLC stated last year, we still expect four times the number of housing cases. Now, landlords are so desperate they are illegally evicting veterans claiming expired leases and alleged serious nuisance violations. The UniteCT program only helps veterans facing eviction for non-payment. Hence, veterans need attorneys to represent them in court to fight landlord abuse so veterans can remain in their homes or gain the time needed to find other affordable housing.

Moreover, veterans continue to be denied access to critical mental healthcare during their mental health crises. CVLC attorneys are the only legal aid attorneys in Connecticut with the expertise to file emergency Character of Discharge applications to the VA to expedite a veteran's access to the healthcare she needs.

### **Outcomes within Service Area**

Last year, with generous support from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, CVLC served 43 indigent veterans and 23 household family members (e.g. spouse and children) in Middlesex County. Of our veteran clients, 28% identified as Black, Indigenous, People of Color, 51% identified as White/Caucasian, and 21% were not comfortable being identified by their race/ethnicity. The initial average annual income of veterans seeking legal help was \$11,026.73. Moreover, 21 veterans were living in project-based, subsidized or transitional shelter housing.

The top three legal matters were housing, VA benefits, and estate planning. CVLC attorneys removed legal barriers resulting in the following life-changing impact in the lives of our nation's heroes living in Middlesex County:

- 83% of veterans seeking legal assistance with a housing matter enjoyed improved housing stability.
- Secured \$87,856.04 in lump sum VA disability income by advocating for veteran rights before the Regional VA and appealing denials for higher level review at the Board of Veteran Appeals and in federal court.
- More than 90% of veterans were referred and/or working with our VA medical partners.

In addition to the tangible outcomes, many CVLC clients express that having an attorney helps them feel heard, honored, and validated. Our attorneys and our volunteer attorneys often develop close bonds with their clients, who benefit emotionally no matter the outcome of their case.

The Foundation can expect similar results, if not projected greater results because of the housing crisis, increase in at-risk veterans being turned away from mental healthcare, and an increase in veterans turning to VA benefits to supplement loss of employment income.

## **2. Sustainability and Assessing Impact**

### **Strategies**

CVLC's strategic plan and mission-driven accountability continues to be responsive to the needs of the indigent veterans we serve. Year after year, the VA's CHALENG survey shows over half of the top ten unmet needs for homeless veterans are legal in nature. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has shined a brighter spotlight on the critical medical-legal partnerships needed to address these social determinants of health. As a result, CVLC will continue to use its medical-legal partnership strategies to holistically serve indigent veterans in need. Moreover, the state and national landscape continues to identify the access to justice barriers faced by indigent individuals; including the inability to afford an attorney to represent them in court. Here, individuals living in poverty are forced to represent themselves alone because they cannot afford to hire an expensive attorney. This is a power imbalance because indigent veterans are fighting along against landlords who can afford attorneys, collection agencies represented by attorneys, and the bureaucratic process denying veterans the healthcare and VA benefits they deserve.

### **Measure of Success**

CVLC measures success of its mission and return on investment in 3 ways: stable and affordable housing, access to healthcare benefits, and increased income.

Moreover, CVLC measures its program success by our passionate workforce. Each of us have made a deliberate chose to work

for CVLC. We believe helping our nation's heroes is a privilege. This passion and mission-drive accountability comes through in the daily advocacy we bring when working with our clients and the national recognition of CVLC from others in our field.

#### Measure to track whether work is succeeding

Data collection, including income, financial benefits and debt, starts at CVLC's first point of contact with each veteran. All Veteran applicant data – including all sources and amounts of income and benefits - is entered into Salesforce, our case management system, by the Screening Coordinator. If a veteran becomes a client, the attorney reviews this financial data during intake.

When closing every legal matter, each attorney must (1) provide written outcome summary (2) check each outcome measure box achieved – stabilized housing, improved access to healthcare, improved financial status/employability (3) enter amount of financial award or reduced debt. Salesforce uses these data points to auto-calculate (1) annual income change (2) lifetime income change as demonstrated legal impact for each veteran. Data integrity is monitored by supervising attorney during closing and re-examined, quarterly, by the Deputy Director.

### **III. Grant Program / Project Information**

#### **Organization Area of Impact (choose ONE)**

Economic Security/Economic Opportunity

#### **Grant Type (choose ONE)**

Program Development/Implementation

#### **Target Demographics (Select all that apply):**

- Adults
- Families
- Retirees
- Veterans
- LGBTQIA+

#### **Geographic Area(s) Served By This Application:**

- Upper County
- Lower County
- Chester
- Clinton
- Cromwell
- Deep River
- Durham
- East Haddam
- East Hampton
- Essex
- Haddam
- Killingworth
- Middlefield
- Middletown
- Old Saybrook
- Portland
- Westbrook

#### **Total Number of People in Middlesex County Personally Impacted**

## IV. Organization Information

### Board of Directors / Trustees Information

**Total Number of Directors/Trustees:**

13

**Percent (%) of Directors/Trustees who contribute annually to Operations**

100%

**Average number attending in person:**

10

**Total Number of Board meetings held last year:**

6

**Date most recent IRS Form 990 was filed:**

1/17/21

**Year of Return:**

2020

**Organization's Fiscal Year**

July 1 - June 30

**Organization's Total Operating Budget**

1173651

### Division Operating Budget Information

### National Organization Chapter Information

**Have you APPLIED for funding from CFMC previously?**

Yes

**Did you RECEIVE a competitive process grant in the:**

- 2018-2019 cycle
- 2019-2020 cycle
- 2020-2021 cycle

**Brief Background Statement of the Organization:**

In 2009 Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC) started the United States' first medical-legal partnership with US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We are the only medical-legal partnership to be co-located at a VA facility. CVLC works in interdisciplinary teams with mental health, medical, and social service clinicians to solve legal problems that affect veteran recovery mental health issues. Our focus is to overcome legal barriers to housing, healthcare and income. CVLC is the only organization in Connecticut that targets the legal needs of indigent and low-income veterans and the only organization in the state that provides legal assistance with veteran-specific issues, such as VA benefits and discharge upgrades.

## V. Additional Information To Be Included with the Application

**Please Note: Additional information requested below MUST be uploaded in PDF files. Other document formats will not be accepted by the application form. Attempts to upload other file formats could result in a loss of all application data entered.**

### A. CFMC Application Budget Summary Form:

- 2021\_Summary-Budget\_CT-Veterans-Legal-Center.pdf

### B. Current Organization Operations Budget

- CT-Veterans-Legal-Center-FY22-Operating-Budget.pdf

### C. Board of Directors and Officers List

- CVLC-Board-and-Officers\_FY2.pdf

### D. IRS Tax Exempt Determination Letter

- CT-Veterans-Legal-Center-W-9-501c3-status.pdf

### E. PPP / EIDL / Other Loan Information

Loan/Grant Type (ie. PPP, EIDL)	Amount Received	Forgiveable or Repayment
PPP	209182	Forgiveable

### F. America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Yes

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**Additional financial documentation, including the organization's most recent audit, annual report, and IRS Form 990 may also be required. Only provide this information if requested.**

For programs or projects which are collaborations among two or more organizations or where an organization provides in-school or after-school programming for schools, the Community Foundation requires a list of organizations or schools partnering with your organization as well as Letters of Support.

For the purposes of this application, collaborations are defined as partnerships where two or more agencies are committed through staffing, funding, and resource allocation to the goals and objectives of the program described. Because the nature of the collaboration requires two or more entities to work together, for the purposes of funding, only one organization may complete the application, and in doing so, accepts responsibility for all evaluative and fiduciary reporting.

For all collaborations, the Community Foundation requires letters of support from the non-applicant organization(s) and/or from the school(s) and school district(s) at which the applicant organization is the program.

**Is this application a collaboration of two or more nonprofit organizations (NOT schools)?**

No

**Is this application in collaboration with a School(s) or School Districts?**

No

**If Yes, is this a New or On-Going Collaboration?**

**If this is an On-Going Collaboration, how long has the collaboration existed?**

**List of Collaborators**

**Letters of Support (if a collaboration with schools or other nonprofits))**

## VI. Organization Contact Information

Are you a new nonprofit applicant to the Community Foundation?

No

### Executive Officer's Name

Liam Brennan

### Title

Executive Director

### Phone

(203) 903-2852

### Executive Officer Email

[lbrennan@ctveteranslegal.org](mailto:lbrennan@ctveteranslegal.org)

### Contact Person

Ashleigh Backman

### Title

Director Pro Bono, Partnerships & Development

### Phone

(203) 871-1487

### Application Contact Email

[abackman@ctveteranslegal.org](mailto:abackman@ctveteranslegal.org)

### Mailing Address

114 Boston Post Rd  
Ground Floor  
West Haven, Connecticut 06516-2043  
United States

### Street Address

Connecticut  
United States

### Website

<https://ctveteranslegal.org/>

### Social Media Channels

@CTVeteransLegal - Twitter

## VII. Non-Funding Needs

CVLC would welcome the opportunity for the Foundation to promote our legal aid program in order to broaden our reach to indigent veterans in need.

## **VIII. Marketing and Public Relations**

Organizations receiving grants from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County must promote their funding awards according to the marketing and public relations guidelines established by the Community Foundation. By signing the application below, the CEO/Executive Director understands the Community Foundation's marketing and public relations requirements if awarded a grant. The Community Foundation will host a seminar on marketing guidelines and tips for grantees annually. The Community Foundation's Grantee Communications Kit may be downloaded on our website in the Nonprofit Resources section, [middlesexcountycf.org/nonprofits/resources/forms-pr-guidelines/](http://middlesexcountycf.org/nonprofits/resources/forms-pr-guidelines/).

## **IX. Tax Exempt Standing and Use of Grant Funding Certification**

By signing this application, the CEO/Executive Director/Board President is certifying that your organization is a qualified 501c3 organization or other charitable organization recognized and currently in good standing with the IRS, or 170(c)(1) governmental agencies. Should a grant be approved by the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, these funds may only be used for the purpose outlined in your original application; you must notify us if you are unable to do so. If grant funding is provided, you may only use these funds for charitable purpose as described in Section 170(c)2 of the IRS code, and funds may not be used for any political or lobbying activity. In addition, no tangible benefits, goods or services may be received by our donors or by staff members of the Community Foundation of Middlesex County in exchange for grant funding.

### **Signature Certification**

I certify that my printed name as stated and assigned below constitutes my signature and may be accepted as such.

**Printed Name**

Ashleigh Backman

**Title**

Director Pro Bono Partnerships and Development

**Date**

09/23/2021



**Board Officers**

**Year Joined Board**

**Chair:** Kevin Lenehan, Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation 2015  
**Secretary:** Kathleen Tourjee, Signify Health 2015  
**Treasurer:** Brian Pierne, Deloitte 2015

**Board Members**

**Year Joined Board**

William J. Pieper, Pentagra Retirement Services 2016  
Jeffrey Udell, Olshan Frome Wolosky LLP 2014  
Alison Weir, Greater Hartford Legal Aid 2017  
Joseph Cherico, McCarter & English 2020  
Margaret Donovan, U.S. Attorney's Office 2020  
Rosendo Garza, Jr., Day Pitney 2020  
Paul Greatsinger, Morgan Stanley Wealth Management 2020  
Erik Lohr, CT Attorney General's Office 2020  
Aza Mosley, CT Dept. Insurance 2020  
Stephan Rice, Pratt & Whitney 2020