



Veterans Legal Services
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Veterans Legal Services Bedford VA Project

Purpose of the project:

The primary purpose of the project is to identify veterans affiliated with the Bedford VA ("VA") who require some type of civil legal services and, as resources permit, to provide such services free of charge. Veterans Legal Services ("VLS") will provide most veterans with counseling and advice or brief service. In some cases, however, the case will require further evaluation to determine if VLS is able to provide additional representation, or if a referral for further representation is warranted.

Veteran eligibility:

VLS will seek to provide meaningful assistance to all veterans who seek services at the VLS Bedford VA project. However, VLS does have client eligibility criteria that a veteran must meet in order to be provided with a significant level of services. Eligibility criteria are as follows.

1. **Low Income.** VLS represents low-income veterans who have gross income from all sources of no more than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. For the current fiscal year, the income limit for a single individual is \$1,962 per month.
2. **Geographic Limit.** VLS represents Massachusetts residents who have legal cases which are principally located in one of the following five (5) counties: Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk, Plymouth, and Suffolk. For veterans who are Massachusetts residents who have cases outside of those counties, VLS is limited to offering brief service.
3. **Case Types.**
 - a. VLS provides assistance on civil (not criminal defense) cases. The areas that VLS may offer the most assistance are as follows: family law (child support, custody, visitation); subsidized housing; landlord/tenant; consumer debt/bankruptcy; CORI; and state and federal veterans' benefits.
 - b. VLS may not assist on fee-generating cases (e.g. "slip and fall," medical malpractice, car accidents). VLS may not assist on Department of Children & Families cases.
 - c. Veterans seeking assistance regarding claims directly against the Bedford VA will only be offered a number for a lawyer referral service.

Operations and staffing:

The VA personnel will identify veterans in need of civil legal assistance and make an initial referral to the VLS legal clinic. For individuals who have previously attended the clinic, VLS will also identify individuals with whom VLS should meet again and will provide those names to the VA in advance of the next clinic date. The individuals identified by the VA and VLS will be scheduled in time slots for the next available clinic date. VLS will provide the VA with a sign-up sheet which VA personnel may use to sign up veterans seeking services. Twenty (20) slots will be available for each clinic. In addition to the twenty regular slots, up to three individuals may be placed on a waiting list to be seen in the event of a cancellation or no-show by one of the veterans signed up for a regular time slot.

Veterans will be encouraged to arrive five to ten minutes before the designated time. Before each interview, one VLS representative will meet with each veteran to complete the following forms:

- The Short Intake Form;
- The Conflict Check Form; and
- The Client Acknowledgment.

The veteran will then be directed to one of the VLS attorneys. Any case identified as a CORI or SORB case should be directed to Judge Cratsley. Judge Cratsley will be assisted by Melissa Chen or another law student/fellow. To protect the attorney-client privilege, *only* the veteran seeking assistance and VLS representatives will participate in the interview. VLS is not permitted to include social workers, VA staff, friends/family members, or other outside individuals in the client interview.

Following the client interview, VLS will determine, in its sole discretion, whether consulting with the VA staff or other individuals/entities is necessary in order to effectively assist the veteran. VLS will obtain an Authorization for Release of Information from the veteran as needed.

The Judge or the VLS attorney will provide advice or brief service to the veteran during the interview. Where a case requires additional research or intervention, the veteran will be told to expect such advice or brief service via a follow-up communication or will be informed that the case will be further evaluated to see if additional representation is appropriate. During the interview, the VLS attorney may request that the veteran return to the next clinic with additional documents/information or sign releases so that VLS may obtain documents/information directly from the source.

If a matter is identified as time-sensitive or requiring immediate intervention, VLS will provide the veteran with as much on-the-spot assistance as resources reasonably permit. VLS will do its best to ensure the veteran is well informed of any relevant upcoming deadlines or time-sensitive issues that require immediate attention so that the veteran may take appropriate steps to respond or to request an extension.