
Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness through Human Services & Legal Aid Partnership

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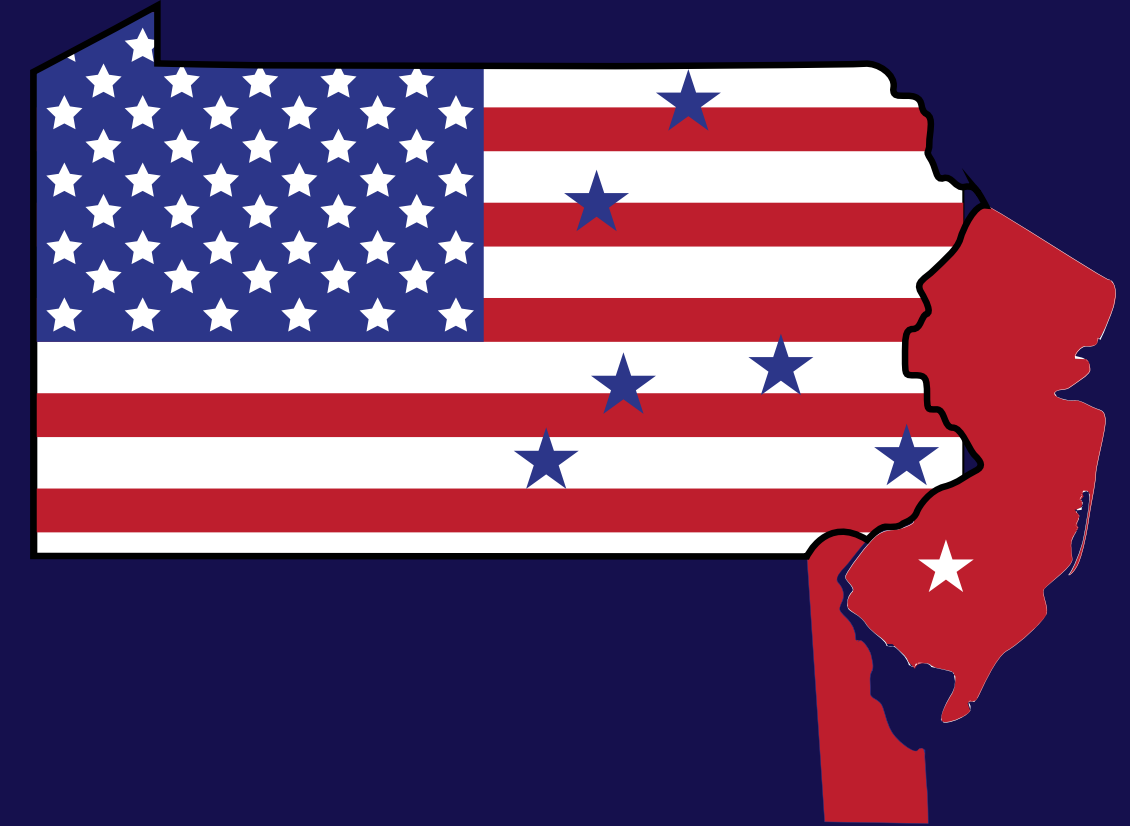
ABOUT VMC

Since 1980, the Veterans Multi-Service Center (VMC) has provided wrap-around services including housing, benefits, employment, and food support to over 6,500 Veteran households annually across Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Southern New Jersey

The VMC has been recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs for its innovative practices. We provide training and technical assistance to federally funded Veteran-serving organizations throughout the country

Visit VMCenter.org to learn more about our mission.

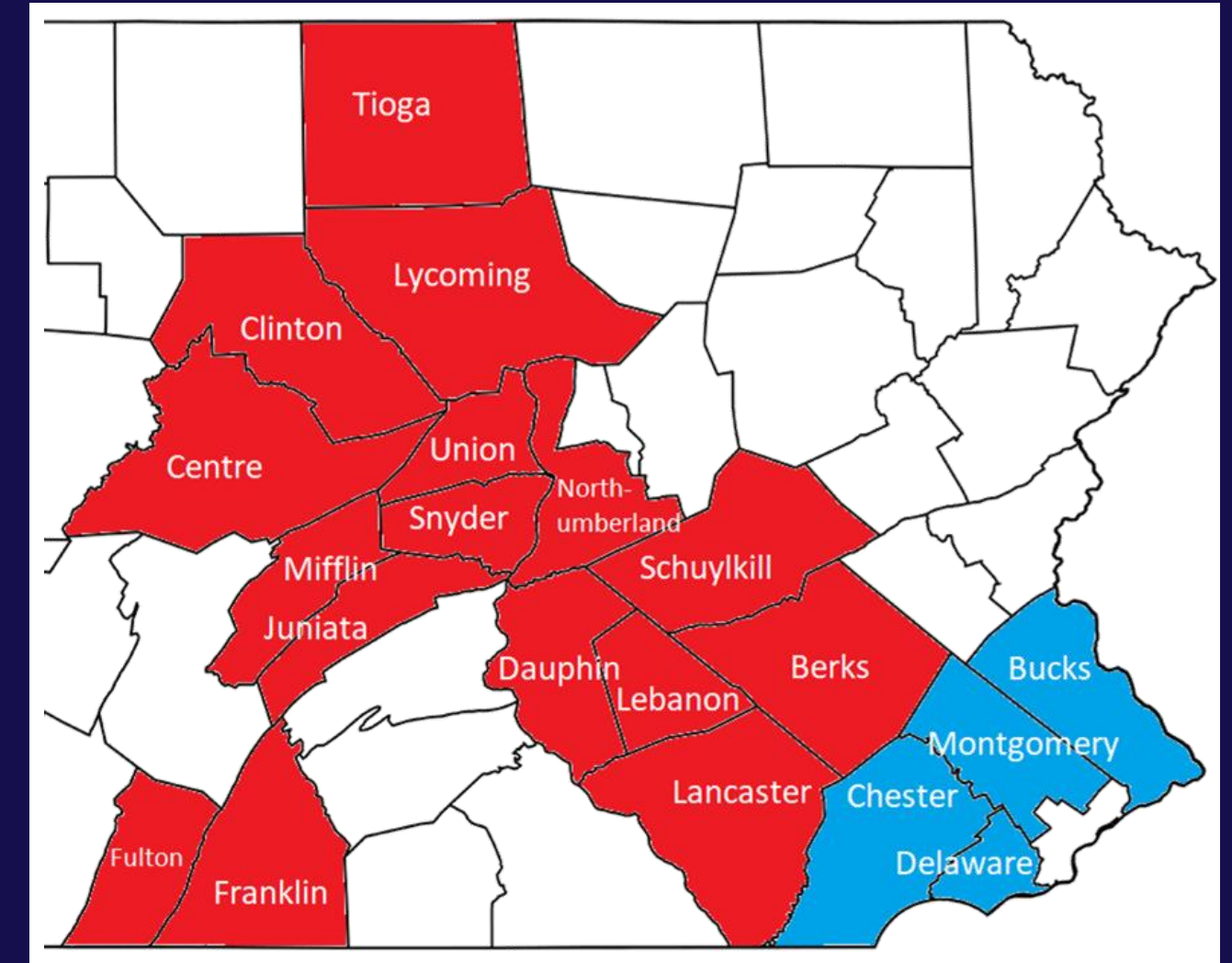
“For Veterans, legal support can be the difference between becoming homeless and having safe, stable housing,” -VA Secretary Denis McDonough



SERVING VETERANS IN:
★ **PENNSYLVANIA**
★ **DELAWARE**
★ **SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY**

ABOUT LASP

- Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania (LASP) provides quality legal representation to low-income people in SE PA, to empower them to solve problems without legal representation through legal education and increased access to the courts, and to change community practices and systems that cause or aggravate poverty.
- LASP's Veterans Unit was established in mid-2020 to provide non-criminal legal services to Veterans, specifically with VA benefits and military discharge upgrades
 - Now serves 20 counties for unhoused and at-risk Veterans
- Dedicated Veterans helpline
- lasp.org



VETERANS

LASP's Veterans Advocacy Project

provides free civil legal aid for veterans
in multiple areas of the law

VETERANS HELPLINE: 610-283-0884

AGENDA

- Why legal services?
- Building Effective Partnerships
- Legal Services as a Rapid Resolution
- Delivery of Services
- Assessing the Legal Needs
- Ongoing Collaboration
- Outcomes and Data



WHY LEGAL SERVICES?

- According to Legal Services Corp. Justice Gap Report, 74% of low-income households experienced at least one civil legal problem in the past year and 39% experienced at least 5.¹

Figure 3B. Percent of low-income households experiencing common types of civil legal problems²²

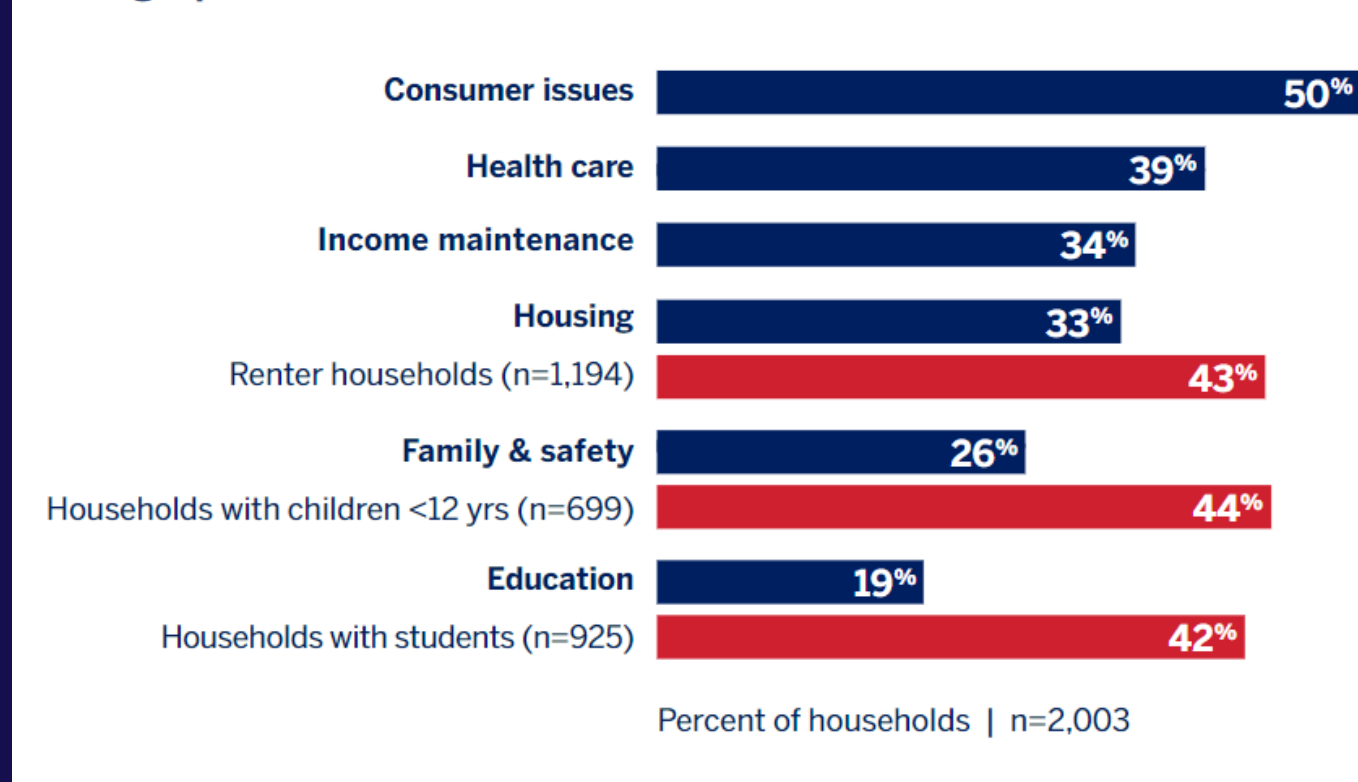
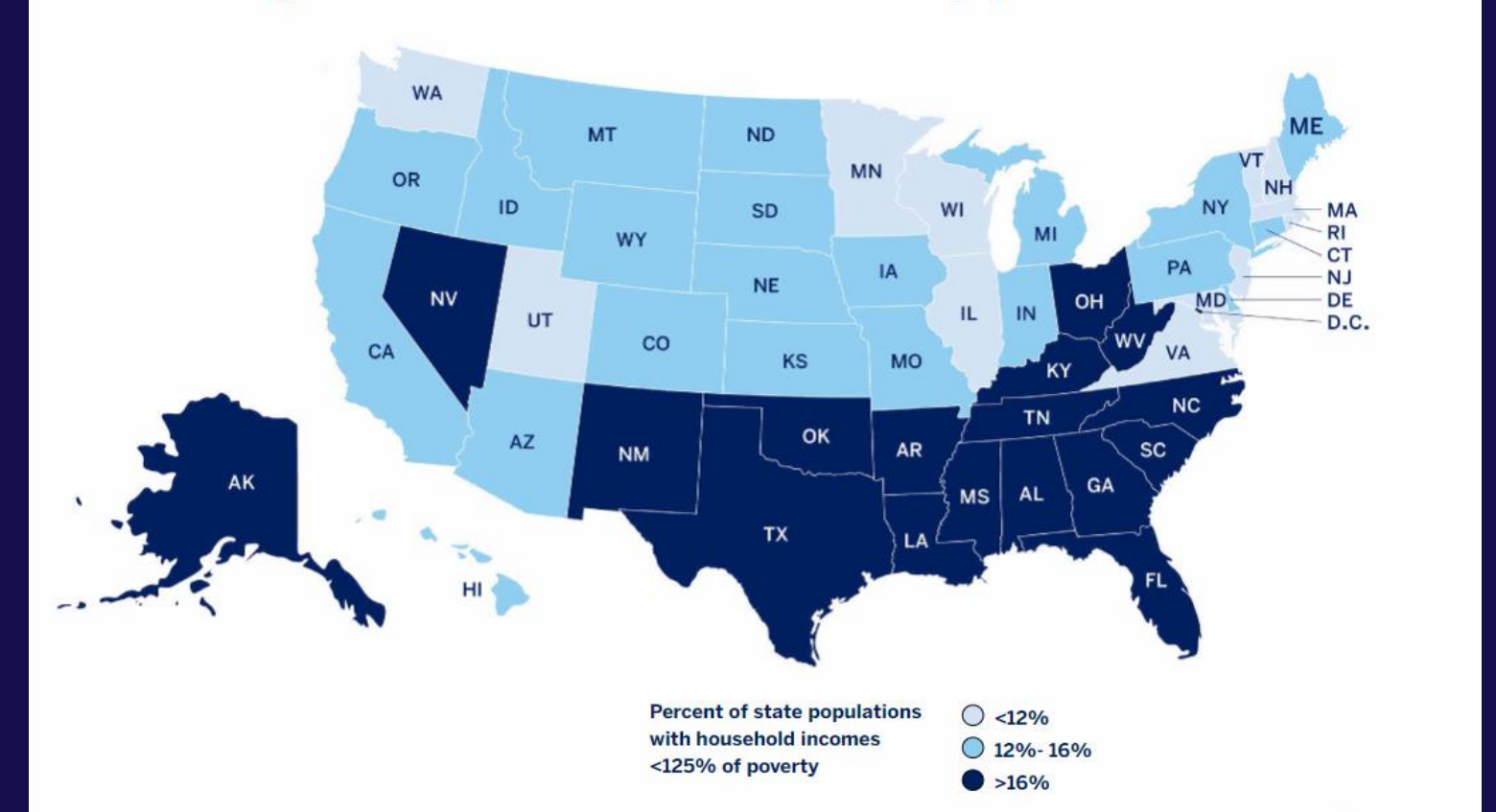


Figure 2A. Low-income Americans' share of state populations in 2021⁸



- 9 out of the 10 highest unmet needs for unhoused veterans have a legal remedy (criminal records; credit issues; discharge upgrades; eviction and foreclosure)²

WHY LEGAL SERVICES? cont'd.

- Studies examining the impact of legal representation in administrative proceedings, mostly involving government benefits, show that people achieve more favorable outcomes when they are represented by attorneys.³
- Tenants facing eviction proceedings, who had no legal aid, remained in their homes 14% of the time; while those who received full representation remained in their homes 55% of the time⁴
- According to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study, after a person had been denied disability benefits, their allowance rate at a hearing was nearly 3x higher if they were represented⁵

BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Creating Partnership & Getting Legal Aid on Board

- A partnership between a human service and legal aid organization works because we share a mission on homelessness and poverty
- When you leave here—How to make initial contact?
 - Research local Legal Aids in your service area
 - Find out who to make the “pitch” to
- Who from your organization, can help you make that initial contact to a legal provider?
 - Executive Director, Board Member, Donor; or combination
- Establish point of contact at both agencies in order to facilitate referrals and questions
- Meet and greet with your staff and legal provider as well as cross agency cultural competency trainings

LEGAL SERVICES AS A RAPID RESOLUTION

- Legal Services is a VERY effective tool to use during initial assessment and crisis response because legal services can identify illegal and discriminatory actions impacting housing and resolve the housing crisis same day
- An attorney can act as a mediator between the Veteran and a landlord or the Veteran and a court proceeding and to help prevent homelessness and reduce the duration of homelessness
- An attorney as an advocate can reduce the trauma and expense associated with extended periods of homelessness and the strain on the housing crisis response system and affordable housing resources in the community
- Many may not realize they need legal assistance, and potentially see legal advocacy as a luxury. A partnership between a human service and legal aid organization can make access to justice a reality for all, regardless of income.

DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Getting Legal Aid onboard

- Not all legal service providers are the same
- Most commonly used legal interventions can include:
 - Expungements, pardons, sealings, outstanding court fees, etc.
 - Eviction prevention and other landlord/tenant issues
 - VA benefits and military discharge upgrades (connected to housing stability)
 - SSI/SSDI applications and appeals
 - Bankruptcy/debt collections
 - Obtaining domestic violence protection from abuse orders
 - Drivers license reinstatements



ASSESSING THE LEGAL NEEDS

VETERAN LEGAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT (9/6/23 VERSION)

DATE: _____

VETERAN PARTICIPANT (VP) NAME: _____

COUNTY OF RESIDENCE:

☐ Bucks ☐ Chester ☐ Delaware ☐ Montgomery

Case managers will submit/email this form to Nicole McCoy as well as print out a copy and place in section 3 of the Veteran's file. This referral will be entered into HMIS by the HMIS Data Specialist with the following note: "Referred to legal services to increase income and/or preserve housing".

Per VMC SSVF policy, all Veterans are immediately assessed for any life, safety threat issues at the point of contact. Staff should immediately alert their direct supervisor, and work to resolve the Veteran's immediate safety issue.

Note: If VP answers "NO" to all questions, please submit this form back to Nicole McCoy for VA tracking purposes.

Script for Legal Needs Assessment:
"Hello- I have some questions here that should only take about 5 minutes to answer. They are all yes or no questions and if you say yes to any of them, we will send this legal referral form to our legal service provider at no cost to you. These questions could help preserve housing or even increase your income."

YOU MUST INCLUDE A 214 WITH THIS REFERRAL-IF YOU DO NOT HAVE ONE-YOU MUST ORDER ONE IMMEDIATELY AND PUT THE DATE ORDERED HERE _____

LEGAL

• Do you have any legal stuff going on right now that may result in your being locked up or having to pay fines?	YES	NO
• Do you have a criminal record that you want expunged?	YES	NO

HOUSING

• Do you have pending or threatened eviction?	YES	NO
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- Collaborate with legal provider on details of legal needs assessment and referral process
- Prioritize housing and income stabilizing issues
- The legal needs assessment is tailored to the geography and areas of practice of each legal provider
- Provide script that staff can use to ask specific questions regarding the legal issues

- *Do you want to apply for VA benefits?*

vs.

Do you have a disability which you believe is from your time in service?

ONGOING COLLABORATION

Referrals

- The referral form is a *living document*
- Updated as new needs are found in the community

Ongoing culturally competent cross-training

- Provides additional layer of screening for immediate crisis-resolution with legal services
- Lunch w/ Lawyers (issue-spotting training)
 - This innovative best practice has been incorporated as a requirement nationally to SSVF providers
- Office hours
- Trauma-informed advocacy



OUTCOMES AND DATA

LASP advocates have opened 962 files from VMC referrals including the following issues:

- 460 Veterans' benefits (VA benefits, overpayments, discharge upgrades)
- 257 expungements and other employment
- 91 landlord/tenant and subsidized housing
- 69 social security
- 33 bankruptcy and debtor relief
- 27 unemployment compensation
- 25 other

These metrics are from only 1 of the 7 legal service providers in Veteran Multi-Service Center's catchment area

OUTCOMES AND DATA cont'd.

LASP advocates have ...

- Obtained **45 positive VA/SSA decisions** for VMC referred veterans
 - \$660,852.77 in retroactive benefits
 - Average decision in 5.4 months
 - \$1,498 average monthly
 - \$20.35 MILLION increase in lifetime income
- Obtained **113 positive VA/SSA decisions** for all
 - \$2.32 MILLION in retroactive benefits
 - \$1,508 average monthly increase
 - \$44.52 MILLION increase in lifetime income
- Obtained **9 waivers of VA overpayments**
 - \$352,585 of indebtedness

OUTCOMES AND DATA cont'd.

LASP advocates have ... Helped real people

- Francine: Unhoused sexual assault survivor
 - Submitted claim on her own; Claim stalled – Tried to schedule exams in Ohio, Maryland, and other far away places with male examiner
 - \$51,286 / \$3,737 / \$1.48 MILLION
- Jonathan: Street homeless
 - Decision in 60 days – \$9,800 / Nursing home access / \$1,663
 - Unable to work, applied for increase in benefits based on unemployability – \$21,391
 - Total retro: \$31,236; Total est. lifetime: \$857,000; income increased from \$0 to over \$3,600 per month
- Kevin: Unable to work, wrong forms had been previously submitted
 - Decision in 40 days
 - \$25,515 / +\$2,064 per month

OUTCOMES AND DATA cont'd.

LASP advocates have ...

- Saved housing together with VMC, within 48 hours of a constable removal
 - VMC Program Manager after not being able to contact landlord, DROVE to the property management office and hand-delivered a promissory letter
- Waived court debt of over \$8,500, which will help criminal record be expunged or pardoned, from a criminal charge directly related to (soon to be) service-connected mental health condition
- Obtained unemployment compensation of over \$4,000 during the pandemic to stop an eviction

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING...

Legal aid and human service organization partnerships can **SAVE LIVES** and help **BREAK the CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY** in OUR communities.

We are doing it in Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey, and Delaware.

And it can be easily replicated wherever you are!

QUESTIONS?

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