

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL NEEDS OF MAINE'S
VETERAN COMMUNITY

Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1967, Pine Tree Legal Assistance has advocated for the rights of Mainers with low incomes, including veterans, by providing advice, information, and legal representation in civil proceedings. While some national data about legal need among veterans is available through CHALENG surveys administered by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs,ⁱ to date no organization in the state of Maine has studied the specific legal needs of its veteran population. To gain a more accurate understanding of this issue, Pine Tree Legal collaborated with the Maine VISTA Project to survey veterans and social service providers in Maine about veteran legal issues.

The survey, which was distributed through a variety of networks, asked respondents to (1) identify legal issues they or their clients had experienced in the past year, (2) report on their likelihood to contact legal services themselves or refer a client to legal services, and (3) rank their familiarity with a variety of legal issues (Appendix A, B).

Pine Tree Legal examined the survey findings in conjunction with data from the organization's six regional offices, which serve veteran households from all sixteen of Maine's counties. The findings of this investigation can be summarized as follows:

- **Most Maine veterans surveyed indicated they experienced a legal problem in the past 12 months;**
- **Veterans are unlikely to contact legal services themselves; &**
- **Social service providers self-reported that they have a limited understanding of most legal issues.**

As the state with the third highest population of veterans per capita,ⁱⁱ Maine must think creatively about how it can best support those who have served in the country's armed forces. Many veterans face homelessness, poverty, unstable family lives, education challenges, and job problems after they return from deployment. **Developing the most effective response to these issues will require social service providers to fully understand the current met and unmet legal needs of the veteran population. Legal aid is an essential partner in addressing those issues.**

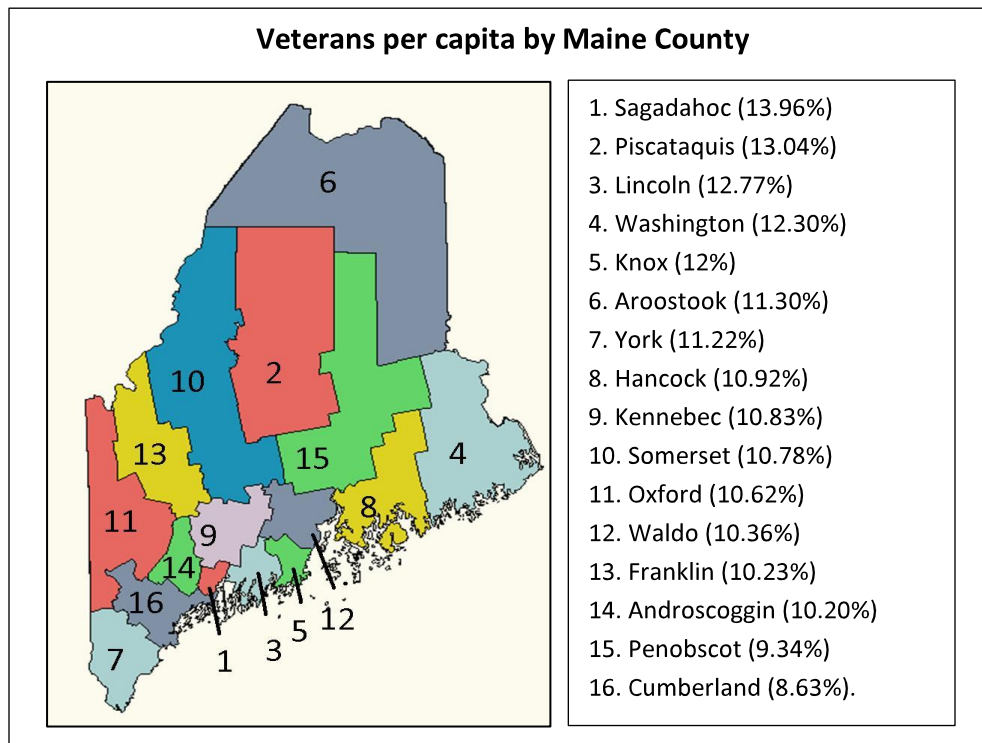
Veterans' lack of access to legal representation for outstanding warrants or fines, as well as for child support and other legal matters, contributes significantly to their risk of becoming homeless.

*-VHA Directive 2011-34
Undersecretary Robert Petzel*

II. BACKGROUND CONCERNS

Need Among the Veteran Community

Homelessness and poverty among veterans are persistent problems that continue to stretch already limited public and social service resources. National estimates suggest that upwards of 130,000 veterans were homeless on a given night in 2009, with that number rising to over 140,000 in 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ Additional estimates by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) report that 1 in 150 of our nation's 22.7 million veterans was homeless in 2010.^{iv} Maine's own statistics demonstrate an equally dire picture: in a survey conducted by the Maine State Housing Authority in 2012, 12% of Maine's homeless were veterans.^v Although the number dropped to 10.8% in 2013, veterans remain overrepresented among Maine's homeless population.^{vi}



With over 2 million service members deployed since September 11, 2001 and over 1 million new veterans released as of August 2011,^{vii} our nation will only see more veterans struggling to access perpetually limited services. To make matters worse, today's veterans are more likely than ever to be in poverty,^{viii} to suffer from a service-related disability,^{ix} and to struggle with lack of employment.^x These concerns are compounded by

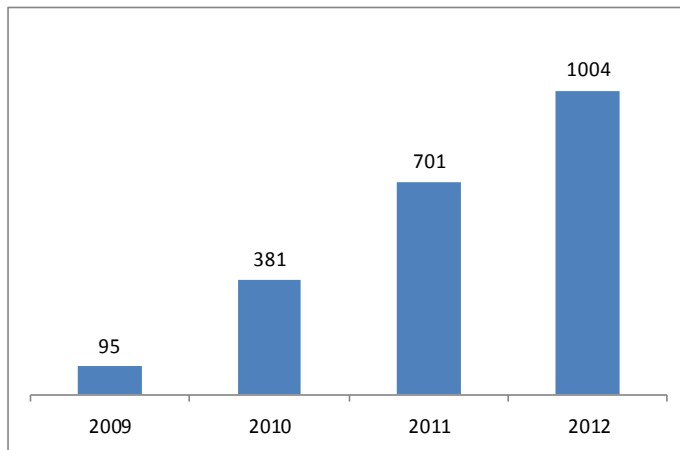
the large geographic distribution of veterans who served in Guard and Reserve units. In rural states like Maine, these individuals often live in areas without extensive local resources and have to travel great distances to access services more readily available in concentrated urban centers. This creates a complicated matrix of need among veterans as they endeavor to build productive and self-sufficient post-military lives for themselves and their families.

Access to Legal Aid

Legal aid programs offer invaluable services to individuals with low-income who face legal problems that disrupt their income, housing, and home lives. Legal aid and legal services date back to the nineteenth century when they were formed to protect the interests of people with low incomes who could not afford representation. Legal aid and legal services are the specific programs geared to enfranchising those who cannot afford to hire legal representation. Civil and administrative law can directly affect how easily individuals and families maintain safe housing, food, and healthcare, but individuals are not entitled to a free attorney to represent them in these areas of law. The same is true for veterans: they have no special entitlement to representation in civil cases. This means that many individuals, veterans and civilians, are left without representation for these types of cases.

Pine Tree Legal Assistance began tracking veteran clients and veteran households in 2010. As the following graph illustrates, more veterans are accessing legal services in Maine, and Pine Tree Legal is doing a better job tracking their specific needs. In 2012, the Legal Services Corporation, the single largest funder of legal aid in the nation, issued a requirement that all of its grantees collect veteran data so that the legal services community is better informed about the specific legal needs of veteran clients. This requirement illustrates the extent to which veteran status corresponds to a unique set of legal needs.

Pine Tree Legal opened over 10 times more cases for Veteran and Active Military households in 2012 than in 2009.



Tracking clients who have served in the military allows legal services to better understand veteran clients and the specific laws and benefits that affect this population. These laws include, but are not limited to, the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Act^{xi} and the Service Member’s Civil Relief Act,^{xii} which include provisions such as the right to employment upon return from deployment and flexibility around family law actions that affect a deployed parent. Many veterans are unaware of these legal protections, and others try to address their legal problems without representation, which can be daunting, stressful, and often ineffective. Legal aid provides an essential gateway to due process for these individuals.

Various national agencies recognize the importance of legal representation to the veteran community. According to Project CHALENG surveys administered by the VA to providers and veterans between 2008 and 2010, three of the top ten unmet needs among homeless veterans were legal.^{xiii} In reality, there are legal causes and solutions to all ten of the top unmet needs reported in the CHALENG survey (see sidebar).

Other service providers also acknowledge various connections between legal services and the needs veterans face. The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) final rule recognizes the role legal assistance can play in maintaining housing stability.^{xiv} A Veteran Health Administration directive also notes that a lack of legal representation

Legal Service Providers offer the following essential support services to veterans:

- *Veterans’ Benefits Appeals**
- *Government benefits appeals**
- *Unemployment claims**
- *Bankruptcy*
- *Fraudulent debt collection**
- *Predatory lending*
- *Foreclosure*
- *Evictions*
- *Housing discrimination*
- *Protection orders*
- *Divorce and parental rights**
- *Child custody and visitation**
- *Child support**
- *Guardianship**
- *Juvenile education support*

*Also identified by Project CHALENG survey respondents as qualifying as one of the Top 10 Unmet Needs. Note: Project CHALENG did not recognize the legal connection of some of these issues.

“contributes significantly to the risk of becoming homeless.”^{xv} Most recently, new federal grant opportunities recognize the value of legal assistance in supporting housing and employment stability. For example, a 2013 Department of Labor Urban and Non-Urban Homeless Veterans Reintegration program directed at reintegration of homeless veterans into the workplace specifically called for grant applicants to,

...demonstrate linkages with community resources that can provide support and legal assistance to homeless female veterans and/or homeless veterans with families in areas of family law, domestic violence, child support enforcement, and poor credit history counseling and repair.^{xvi}

In response to the growing national recognition of the impact legal information has on stabilizing the lives of our country’s veterans and service members, the Legal Services Corporation, sponsored the development of an online resource called Stateside Legal (www.statesidelegal.org) by Pine Tree Legal Assistance. Launched in 2010 at the White House, Stateside Legal is a national web-based resource accessed by veterans, servicemembers, and their families worldwide for relevant and current information about their legal rights. The website’s primary goal is to educate the military community about their rights so that they are empowered to use the law to protect themselves. The website’s secondary goal is to provide information and support to those who advocate for veterans and servicemembers. The website is well-received, having passed a million page views in 2013. Stateside Legal has also been accessed from all 50 United States and over 150 countries including Iraq and Afghanistan. The increasing traffic and diverse traffic illustrate the continuing need for these types of resources.

Despite the success of online resources, they are not a substitute for direct, personalized representation or advice. At present, low-income individuals can only access direct legal representation through Maine’s legal service providers. According to a statewide report by the Maine Justice Action Group, legal aid programs only have the capacity to assist one in five eligible cases.^{xvii} Given that low-income individuals encounter an average of 1-2 legal problems per year,^{xviii} many individuals do not receive the assistance they need. Although legal aid is recognized as a positive force on the lives of low-income veterans, legal aid programs cannot currently meet the demand for their services because of their funding difficulties.

Veterans and Social Service Providers were asked about the following legal issues:

- *Problems accessing military or veteran’s benefits*
- *Scams, such as bad checks or phone offers*
- *Identify theft*
- *Debt collection*
- *Bankruptcy*
- *Utilities*
- *Purchase agreements or contracts*
- *Landlord problems, including eviction*
- *Unsafe or uninhabitable housing (including bed bugs, exposed wires, etc.)*
- *Foreclosure*
- *Problems paying property taxes*
- *Changes to rental agreements (to accommodate service animals, for example)*
- *Housing discrimination*
- *Getting or keeping government benefits*
- *Collecting or keeping Social Security*
- *Auto purchase or repair*
- *Accessing education services for a child*
- *Bullying or harassment of a child at school*
- *Job problems*
- *Unwillingness of an employer to accommodate disability*
- *Difficulty returning to job after deployment*
- *Problems with work-related injury or worker’s compensation*
- *Federal or State taxes*
- *Child visitation, custody, or support*
- *Divorce*
- *Guardianship, wills, or estates*
- *Abuse, dating violence, or stalking*
- *Accused of abuse, dating violence, or stalking*
- *Notice from DHHS about child abuse substantiation*
- *Notice from DHHS about the revocation of a license or collecting back child support*
- *Getting necessary medical services*
- *Criminal Legal Assistance*
- *DUI, OUI, or traffic violation*

III. HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

Maine’s veterans are at high risk of experiencing a variety of legal problems:

- 70% of veteran survey respondents reported that they experienced one or more of the target legal issues in the past 12 months;
- 77% of *homeless* veteran survey respondents reported that they experienced one or more of the target legal issues in the past 12 months; and
- 98% of service provider respondents reported that one of their clients experienced one or more of the target legal issues in the past 12 months.

Maine veterans are unlikely to seek assistance for legal problems. When they do seek assistance, veterans are more likely to contact a private attorney than a legal aid provider:

- 8% of veteran survey respondents contacted Pine Tree Legal;
- 16% of veteran survey respondents contacted a private attorney about a legal problem;
- 47% of veteran survey respondents reported that they had contact information for Pine Tree Legal; and
- 10% of veteran survey respondents had contact information for the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project, a *pro bono* project run by Pine Tree Legal.

Many social service providers do not refer clients to legal aid organizations at a rate that balances out their limited understanding of civil legal issues.

- Social service providers self-reported a “poor” to “moderate” understanding of basic legal protections;
- 20% of providers whose clients reported a legal issue in the past 12 months **did not** refer the client to Pine Tree Legal; although
- 93% of social service providers reported having contact information for Pine Tree Legal.

IV. UNDERSTANDING THE FINDINGS

70% of veteran respondents indicated that they had experienced one of the 36 listed legal problems in the past twelve months.

This illustrates the extent of need for legal services among the veteran community. In reality, this number could be higher, as many individuals have difficulty identifying legal needs in their lives. Pine Tree Legal has found over its years of experience that many individuals, including veterans, are not likely to link legal solutions to common problems such as homelessness or unfairly garnished wages. Discussions with VA staff have revealed that some veteran clients understand legal problems to be criminal transgressions that involve police intervention. In reality, the law provides protection and support to individuals in many situations, most of which do not involve the police or criminal proceedings. During client interviews, trained legal services specialists often identify many non-criminal problems that can be resolved or minimized through legal channels.

This tendency is particularly well-evidenced by veteran survey respondents who did not connect their unstable housing to legal problems:¹

- 21% of veterans who reported no legal problem in the past year also reported that they were at risk of losing their home at the time of the survey; and
- 85% of veterans who experienced homelessness in the past year reported having no problems with a landlord, including eviction.

The high percentage of veterans who reported no legal problem in correlation with homelessness suggests that many veterans do not fully understand the legal processes that lead to instability in their lives. The same tendency can be inferred about other legal issues such as Social Security appeals, VA benefits appeals, discriminatory employment practices, and fraudulent debt collection. In these cases, the legal needs of veterans may be more accurately identified by social service providers who have been trained with a basic legal understanding around the full range of destabilizing issues affecting their clients.

Many veterans do not understand what qualifies as a legal problem:

“When asked if a veteran has a legal problem, they often respond that they don’t have a problem with the police.”

-Homeless Prevention Team Member, VA Maine Healthcare System

¹ See page 14 for further discussion of the housing needs of veterans.

98% of social service providers indicated that they worked with a veteran client who experienced one of the listed legal problems in the past twelve months.

Social service providers report a higher incident of legal need than veterans, which could be related to both the difficulty many individuals have in correctly identifying their own legal issues and to the general need among the population that utilizes social services. Social service providers are more likely to work with clients who struggle to meet basic needs such as housing or healthcare. The high incident of legal need reported among veterans who utilize social services reinforces the Maine Justice Action Group's conclusion that low-income households typically experience an average of 1 to 2 problems per year that could benefit from legal intervention.^{xix} See below for more specific information about the most pressing types of legal issues identified by social service providers and their veteran clients.

Top Five Needs Identified by Service Providers

- Problems accessing military benefits (75.0%)
- Problems with landlords (59.0%)
- Job problems, including hiring and payment (24.4%)
- Divorce (48.5%)
- Getting or keeping government benefits (47.0%)

Top Five Legal Needs Identified by Veterans²

- Problems accessing military benefits (24.4%)
- Job problems, including hiring and payment (24.4%)
- Debt collection, including phone harassment (20.3%)
- Child visitation, custody, or support (14.6%)
- Getting or keeping Social Security benefits (13.8%)

Top Legal Needs Identified by Homeless Veterans

- Job problems (29.2%)
- Debt Collection (26.4%)
- Accessing military or veterans benefits (23.6%)
- Getting or keeping Social Security benefits (16.7%)
- Child visitation, custody, or support (16.7%)

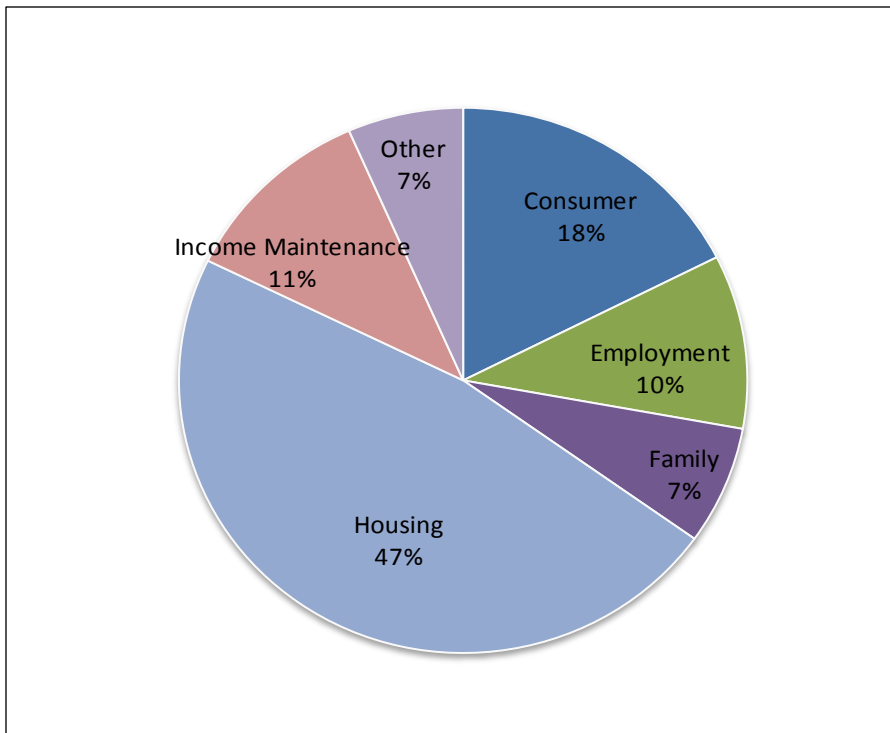
² See page 24 for a discussion on the difference in legal needs between female and male veterans.

In 2012, Pine Tree Legal helped veteran households with over 100 different types of legal problems.

These problems include a range of issues that fall within the general categories of housing, income maintenance, employment, family, and consumer law. Each of these categories covers more specific issues that range from wrongfully denied public benefits and abusive partners to discrimination by potential employers and unjustified expulsion of minors from school.

The legal needs reported by veterans and their social service providers correlate with the common types of cases Pine Tree Legal handled for veterans in 2012. This means that many of the problems that veterans face fall within the expertise of existing legal aid staff.

- Housing: 302 cases (32.8%)
- Family law, including custody: 238 cases (25.8%)
- Consumer issues, including debt collection: 152 cases (16.5%)
- Income Maintenance, including benefits: 115 cases (12.5%)
- Employment: 52 cases (5.6%)



Service providers self-report that they have a fairly low understanding of most legal issues.

The surveys asked respondents to rate their familiarity with a variety of legal matters on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The results are as follow:

- 83% of social service providers reported a low to moderate understanding of family law situations, including child support, divorce, and protection orders;
- 76.6% of social service providers reported a low to moderate understanding of someone’s rights when being harassed by creditors;
- 66.7% of social service providers reported a low to moderate understanding of a tenant’s right when facing eviction for non-payment of rent;
- 55.3% reported a low to moderate understanding of a tenant’s rights when facing a discriminating situation; and
- 45.4% of social service providers reported a low to moderate understanding of the difference between civil and criminal law.

Although social service providers report a limited understanding of legal issues, they are still able to identify the issues their clients face. The problem is that social service providers may not translate identification of a legal problem into a referral to legal services. The fact that many providers have even a limited understanding of various legal concerns provides a strong foundation for collaboration. However, social service providers also demonstrated that they do not currently always refer clients to legal aid when they believe the client has a legal problem. This is illustrated by the referral gap among social service providers:

- 98% of social service providers reported working with a client who faced a legal issue in the past year;
- 78% of providers had referred a client to Pine Tree Legal; and
- 68% of providers suggested their client contact a private attorney.

This means that up to 20% of identified legal issues were not referred to legal aid. Of the percentage of clients referred to a private attorney, it is impossible to know if the client was even able to afford services.

Eliminating the referral gap is one way to increase the percentage of veterans who get legal help. One way to minimize the referral gap is to build direct partnerships between legal aid programs and social service

providers. Another important consideration is the capacity of legal aid programs to accept cases. Social service providers will be more inclined to refer cases to legal aid if they think their client will actually receive assistance, so legal aid must be able to demonstrate that referred clients at least make it through the intake process.³

In other words, the limiting factor in addressing the pressing legal needs of the veteran community is characterized not only by social service provider understanding of legal issues and legal aid, but also by the capacity of legal aid to serve the number of veterans who are referred for legal assistance. Legal aid organizations are accustomed to “chronic under-funding and overwhelming case loads,”^{xx} and face annual changes to budgets and funding types. In recent years, shrinking budgets further frustrate attempts to develop and sustain specialized programs that attend to the specific legal needs of veterans.

To improve the services veterans receive, we must think about the limits that define the work of both social service providers and legal aid providers. By accommodating these limitations by thinking creatively about referral procedures and funding options, it is more likely that the partnership will be sustainable and effective.

³ *Legal aid providers have various guidelines and priorities from funders that affect which cases are eligible for service. These guidelines change depending on grant cycles and overall program capacity, so legal aid providers cannot guarantee what type of assistance referred clients would receive.*

V. THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION

Social service providers are often the first resource veterans turn to in their times of need. These providers include national organizations such as the VA National Call Center for Homeless Veterans, which provides access to state level counselors, and local organizations, such as Preble Street, which offers shelter housing, services, and food to homeless individuals, veterans, and families in Portland, Maine. This network of local, statewide, and national social service providers offers extensive and necessary services for veterans but cannot be expected to singlehandedly alleviate the various problems faced by Maine veterans. This is especially true when veterans face issues that have legal causes and solutions. In these cases, social service providers play another essential role: connecting veterans to legal aid providers.

Maine has already seen the value of collaboration through a partnership between Preble Street's Veteran Housing Services and Pine Tree Legal Assistance. Although Pine Tree Legal and Maine's other legal aid organizations regularly share legal information with service providers, the Preble Street-Pine Tree Legal relationship is the only funded partnership in the state that guarantees direct legal information, advice and representation to veterans identified and referred by a social service provider. Under the grant that funds the collaboration, Preble Street reimburses Pine Tree Legal for staff time spent providing legal assistance to veteran clients referred by Preble Street.

In the first 1.5 years of this partnership, Pine Tree Legal provided 80 veteran households with legal information, advice, and representation in support of maintaining or gaining stable housing. In the same period, Pine Tree Legal prevented 1,876 days of homelessness for veteran clients by delaying or dismissing eviction so the veteran could find alternative housing. This is equal to approximately 3.5 days of housing for each day the partnership was in effect, which illustrates the value of collaboration between legal aid and social service providers.

Cases in Point

Each intervention by legal aid on behalf of a veteran client or household has the potential to increase the household's overall stability. This is particularly well-illustrated by the two following case studies. Please note that names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

Social Service Providers offer the following essential support services to veterans:

- *Employment counseling*
- *Housing units*
- *Education opportunities*
- *Health Services*
- *Mental health services*
- *Recreational Activities*
- *Case management services*
- *Children and family support*
- *Financial counseling*
- *Government benefits applications*
- *Veterans' Benefits Applications*
- *Elder support services*

Jonathan

Pine Tree Legal helped Jonathan secure housing by connecting him to appropriate mental health services and a more stable income. Jonathan, a veteran, contacted Pine Tree Legal when facing an eviction due to rental arrears and failing a public housing inspection because of hoarding, a diagnosed mental illness. Pine Tree Legal referred Jonathan to case management services available through Preble Street, which helped him secure mental health counseling and complete an application for a non-service connected pension. Meanwhile, Pine Tree Legal's intervention halted the eviction proceeding, which provided Jonathan with sufficient time to fully benefit from the additional services and income he received through Preble Street, which made it more likely that he would retain stable housing in the future.

Ezra and his Family

Pine Tree Legal secured stable housing for Ezra and his family who faced eviction for rental arrears. The family fell behind in rent because it was making payments on unreasonably high heating bills that were caused by a poorly maintained building. Pine Tree Legal helped the family enforce its rights under the warranty of habitability statute. Pine Tree Legal also negotiated with the landlord's attorney to postpone the eviction for a month. This additional time allowed the family's social worker to secure a long term housing voucher for the family so they would not become homeless after the eviction.

The success of collaboration in these two instances is indicative of the value of partnerships between legal service organizations and social service providers. In reflecting on these types of partnerships, the Director of Veteran Housing Services Program, Phil Allen, says it best:

Our partnership works because at the foundation of both agencies is the mission to serve an underserved population effectively and thoroughly. Although we come from different perspectives, our goals coalesce on our shared clientele and it is the different perspectives that offer these clients a more complete and holistic service.

In successful partnerships such as this, different perspectives unite around the single goal of providing the best service for our country's veterans. These collaborations can help alleviate, and, ultimately, eliminate the referral gap that this legal survey uncovered.

Legal Service Providers offer the following essential support services to veterans:

- *Veterans' Benefits Appeal*
- *Government benefits appeals*
- *Unemployment claims*
- *Bankruptcy*
- *Fraudulent debt collection*
- *Predatory lending*
- *Foreclosure*
- *Evictions*
- *Housing discrimination*
- *Protection orders*
- *Divorce and parental rights*
- *Child custody and visitation*
- *Child support*
- *Guardianship*
- *Juvenile education support*

VI. HOUSING STABILITY: A CLOSER LOOK AT LEGAL AID

The need for ongoing partnerships becomes clear when evaluating the ways in which common social and economic stressors have legal solutions. This is particularly clear in the context of housing and homelessness. In 2009, Secretary Shinseki of the Department of Veteran Affairs pledged to end veteran homelessness by 2015 because of the connection between stable housing and stable lives.^{xxi} As a result of this commitment, federal funding increased to social service programs that address homelessness among veterans.

Linking individuals who are at risk of losing their housing to legal aid providers such as Pine Tree Legal could reduce the incidence of chronic homelessness among veterans. On a practical level, this means that the individuals who responded to the survey who had already lost their homes or were at risk of losing their homes likely could have been assisted by some type of legal intervention. This is corroborated by anecdotal evidence collected from legal aid organizations, social service providers, and federal agencies. The Department of Housing and Urban Development is dedicated “to clos[ing] the front door of entry into homelessness,” which highlights preventative programs that prioritize housing and economic stability before homelessness occurs.^{xxii} Many of these preventative measures can be achieved through legal assistance.

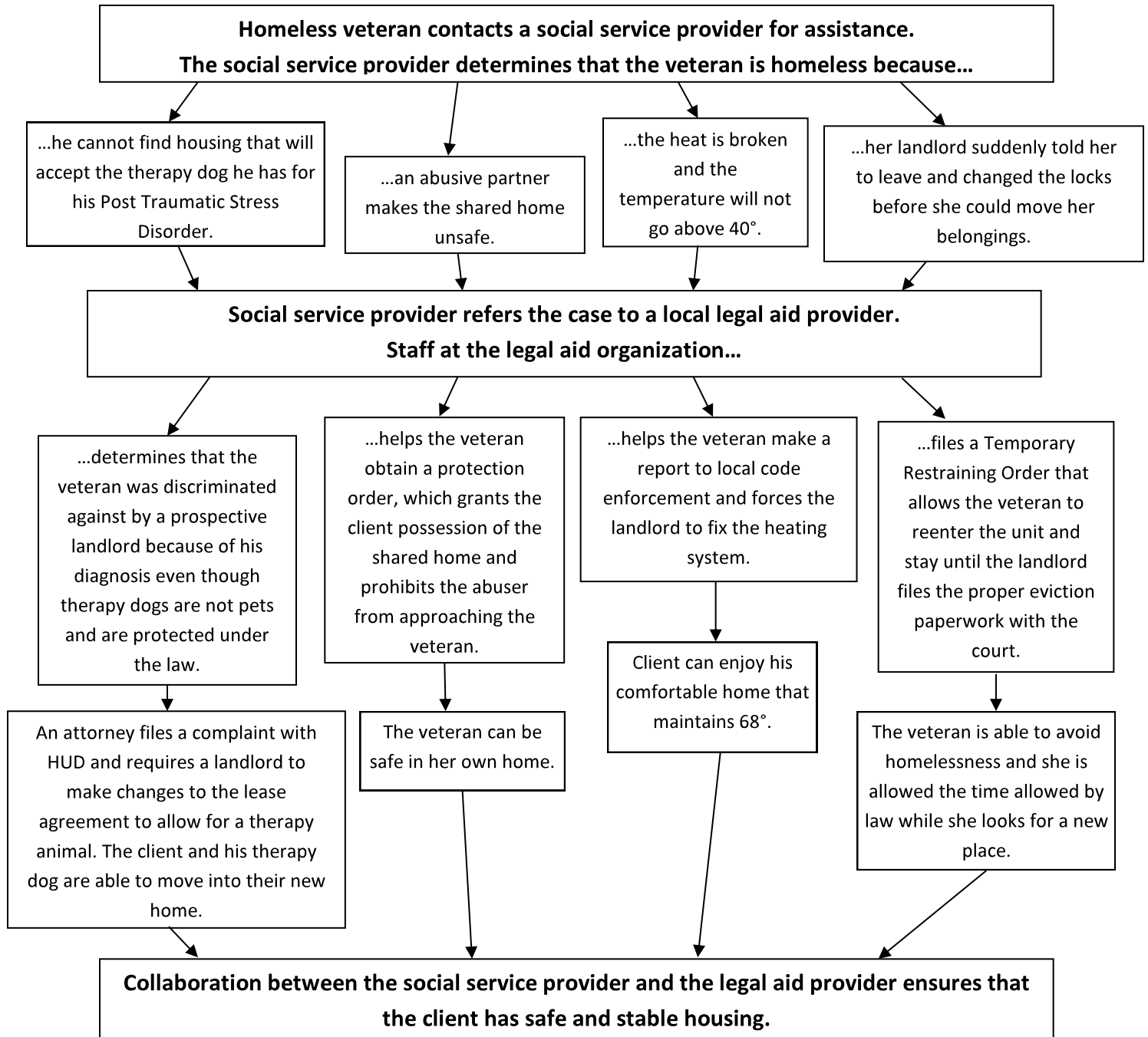
...the individuals who responded to this survey who had already lost their homes or were at risk of losing their homes likely could have been assisted by some type of legal intervention.

28% of veteran survey respondents were homeless at the time of this survey. An additional 45% had been homeless at some point in the previous year.

According to national estimates, upwards of 1 in 150 veterans is homeless and 1 in 9 lives in poverty and at risk of homelessness.^{xxiii} When applied to Maine, this means that 15,000 of our state’s veterans experience poverty and over 923 of Maine veterans may be without a place to sleep on any given night.^{xxiv} Despite the high number of veterans who had experienced homelessness in the past year, very few (11% of all veterans surveyed and 15% of veterans who were homeless at the time of the survey) reported that their legal needs included an issue with housing. Service providers were more likely to identify housing-related legal needs among their clients (59% of those surveyed), which supports the argument that additional collaboration between social service providers and legal aid providers could make headway on the issue of homelessness among veterans.

Legal Assistance can help preserve housing

Foreclosure and eviction, two of the legal processes through which housing is taken away from individuals, are often influenced by other stressors such as job loss, disability, lowered benefits, family strife, or illness. Many of these issues can be addressed through legal intervention. The following flow chart identifies four scenarios for what would happen after a homeless veteran contacts a social service provider who is familiar with the legal aid resources available in the area.



Stable Housing yields more stable lives

Overall, this survey suggested that people with stable housing are less likely to have other legal problems. According to the survey conducted by Pine Tree Legal, 77% of respondents who experienced homelessness in the past year also reported having some sort of legal need. In contrast, only 58% of respondents who did *not* experience homelessness reported an incident of legal need. In other words, approximately *three quarters of veterans with unstable housing will experience a legal problem, but only half of veterans with stable housing will experience a legal problem.* This difference demonstrates that veterans with more stable housing were less likely to report a legal problem.

This finding corroborates the growing belief among social service providers that stable housing fosters security in other aspects of one's life. This model of homelessness prevention is known as Housing First. This type of case management model is central to the VA's housing voucher program (HUD VASH) and SSVF grantees.^{xxv} With a stable place to live, veterans are more likely to hold down jobs, their children are more likely to attend school regularly, and their families are less likely to require emergency shelter and social services.^{xxvi} Although legal aid cannot furnish all of the support necessary to maintain stable housing, it can play a central role in closing the door on homelessness.

"In the past, VA focused largely on getting homeless Veterans off the streets. Our five-year plan aims also at preventing them from ever ending up homeless."

-Secretary Shinseki, Pledge to End Veteran Homelessness, November 3, 2009

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The Need for Legal Aid is self-evident

The legal need among the veteran population is clear. Veterans encounter the same issues in securing housing, maintaining their incomes, and stabilizing their family lives as other individuals with low incomes. These challenges are often complicated by disability, single-parent households, limited work experience, and limited education, which are increasingly common attributes of today's young veterans. Those who serve our country deserve our recognition and thanks; they should not be struggling to maintain basic necessities for themselves and their families.

Legal aid provides essential solutions to common social and economic problems

Many of the issues that veterans encounter can be remedied through legal intervention. Legal aid can help veterans claim unpaid wages or access public benefits. Legal aid can also postpone or dismiss evictions, thereby ensuring housing stability and preventing homelessness. Legal aid is a logical addition to the social services that many veterans regularly access. This nation's veterans will be best served if they can access the legal support that will help solve some of the social and economic problems they face.

Partner with Social Service Providers

Service providers are often the first resource that struggling veterans seek. Many of the needs within the military and veteran community correlate with the existing expertise of Maine's legal aid providers. The present challenge is to build partnerships between those programs and furnish resources to legal aid organizations so they can provide referred clients with extended representation in their legal matters. As illustrated by Pine Tree Legal's partnership with Preble Street, these partnerships help our country's veterans achieve justice for themselves and their families.

Legal aid providers must have increased capacity so they can better address the legal needs of veterans

A statewide report published by the Maine Justice Action Group in 2007 illustrates that limited staff resources at legal aid providers mean 83% of income eligible clients do *not* receive the level of legal assistance required

"Folks in the military and veterans have all of the same legal needs as the rest of the general client population. In addition, they are entitled to the protection of many special federal and state laws that have not been consistently enforced."

-Nan Heald, Executive Director, Pine Tree Legal

to resolve their cases.^{xxvii} In 2009, a review of Maine's legal aid provider resources revealed that Maine's civil legal aid providers only have the capacity to assist 1 in every 5 legal cases that low-income Maine residents face.^{xxviii}

To provide the best service, advocates need to understand all of the laws, rules, programs, and benefits that are relevant to their clients. Veterans will inevitably encounter legal problems, and it is the responsibility of legal aid providers to not only have the staff capacity to address these legal problems, but also to have the veteran-specific expertise to provide the best service possible.

As funding has continued to decline, this situation has worsened. Outreach and education efforts can make individuals more capable of advocating for their own rights, as illustrated by existing resources such as Stateside Legal and Pine Tree Legal's extensive client education materials, but those resources do not replace personalized one-on-one legal support from a qualified legal aid provider.

In the past two years, federal funding for legal services has dropped by over 14%.^{xxix} As a result, Pine Tree Legal has lost substantial funding that had been used to support general legal services around the state, including specialized work on veteran cases. Without special grants or new funding, it will be difficult for legal aid programs to add staff and build comprehensive programs to address the unique legal needs and rights of veterans.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

The first step in understanding the legal needs of veterans was to collect information from veterans and the social service providers who serve them. In the fall of 2012, Pine Tree Legal worked with an AmeriCorps VISTA member to develop a survey about legal needs within the veteran community. Pine Tree Legal distributed two unique surveys: the first to veterans, and the second to the agencies, groups and individuals who provide services to veteran clients. Over 130 veterans and 70 veteran social service providers responded to the survey. They identified legal needs they or their clients had experienced, rated their familiarity with particular legal problems, and reported their likelihood to seek legal assistance for themselves or their clients. (See Appendix A, B.)

Audience- Pine Tree Legal targeted veterans and veteran service providers in the state of Maine. Many of the veteran respondents were reached through homeless supportive services and social service providers, but there was no explicit effort to specifically target low income or homeless veterans. Service providers were identified through resource fairs, regional Veteran (Vet) Centers, and veteran-specific outreach events.

Data Collection- Surveys were administered to both groups electronically through SurveyMonkey.com and in paper form by Pine Tree Legal staff and support group coordinators at resource fairs, support groups, and planning groups. Links to the online survey were also shared on Maine veteran service provider listserves and through informal peer connections.

Veteran Respondent Survey Questions- Pine Tree Legal collected basic demographic information from veteran survey respondents, which included age, gender, household size, income, and county of residence.⁴ The survey also asked for information about each respondent's military service, including the length of service, branch of service, and combat experience.

The majority of survey questions were designed to establish an understanding of the types of legal issues faced by veterans by asking

⁴ See page 22 for additional data on these demographics.

veterans to indicate if they had experienced any of the 36 targeted legal problems. Veterans were also asked to indicate whether they had sought any type of legal assistance for any problems they had experienced in the previous year and answered a series of questions about their housing stability.

Finally, the survey asked veterans to indicate whether they had contact information for state legal aid providers, including Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Legal Services for the Elderly, the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project, the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, or the Disability Rights Center.

Provider Respondent Survey Questions- Each service provider reported their geographic service area (county) and general service priorities and parameters, including whether the military community is the organization's exclusive target population, whether the organization tracks military service among its clientele, and if income screening is a standard prerequisite for assistance. Service providers also reported their agency name and identified all types of services provided to clients.

Service providers were then asked to indicate if any of the veteran clients they worked with in the past year had experienced any of the 36 targeted legal issues. The survey followed up these questions by asking providers to use a 5-point scale to self-evaluate their familiarity with a variety of legal issues.

Finally, the survey asked providers if they had ever referred clients to Pine Tree Legal or a private attorney and whether they had contact information for state legal aid providers, including Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Legal Services for the Elderly, the Maine Volunteers Lawyers Project, the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, and the Disability Rights Center.

IX. DEMOGRAPHICS & TRENDS

Substantial effort was made in surveying veterans to get a broad range of perspectives across ages, geographic location, income level and gender. The service provider survey also intended to poll providers representative of the broad range of services that veterans require. Some highlighted demographics and trends are discussed below.

Veterans

Geographic distribution- The percentage of respondents from York, Cumberland, and Kennebec (64%) is higher than the population distribution estimated by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS) for those three counties, which indicates that 43% of Maine's veteran's population comes from these three counties. 6% of veteran survey respondents came from the four counties with the highest per capita veteran population (Lincoln, Piscataquis, Sagadahoc, and Washington), whereas the NCVAS estimates that 11% of Maine's veteran population lives in these counties. These data suggest that veterans from more urban counties may be overrepresented in this survey. This trend could be due to the concentration of services for veterans or low income individuals within more urban counties. Veterans with easier geographic access to services likely had an improved chance of participating in the survey.

Veterans with easier geographic access to services may have an improved chance of demonstrating their legal needs when compared to veterans in rural areas.

Age characteristics- 36.9% of veteran survey respondents reported their age in the bracket of 50- to 59- years of age. The next largest age brackets were 60- to 69-years-old (21.5% of respondents) and 40- to 49-years-old (20.8% of respondents). 21- to 29-year-olds and 30- to 39-year-olds made up 6.9% and 8.5% of the veteran population, respectively. When comparing these data to state estimates, the survey seems to have overrepresented 50- to 59-year-olds, as they make up only 17.4% of Maine's veteran population.^{xxx} Veterans aged 60-69 constitute 26.1% of Maine's veteran population, and those aged 40-49 constitute 13.5%. The large respondent count of veterans aged 50- to 59-years may correlate with an increased need for supportive services at this age (for example, 51% of those who reported homelessness in the previous year were aged 50-59, despite the fact that this age bracket only made up 36.9% of all survey respondents).

Homelessness- 28% of respondents indicated they were homeless at the time of the survey, and 40% indicated that they had been homeless in the previous year. Of respondents who indicated current homelessness or a history of homeless in the past year, 57.6% reported income below the federal poverty level for a household of one. Respondents who indicated current homelessness or a period of homelessness in the past year reported the following estimated incomes:

- 28.8% indicated a monthly income of \$0.00 to \$500.00
- 28.8% indicated an income of \$501.00 to \$1000.00,
- 19.2% indicated \$1,001.00 to \$1,500.00
- 11.5% indicated \$1,501.00 to \$2,000.00
- 1.9% indicated \$2,001.00 to \$2,500.00
- 0.0% indicated \$2,501.00 to \$3,000.00
- 9.6% indicated \$3,001.00 and up

Gender- 21.2% of veteran survey respondents identified as female, and 78.8% identified as male. The number of female veteran respondents exceeds current population estimates by the VA which indicate that women make up 7.8% of Maine's veteran population.^{xxxi} 35.4% of female survey respondents indicated that they were currently homeless or at risk of losing their housing, whereas 44.6% of men reported the same. 17% of female veterans surveyed reported a period of homelessness in the previous year, compared to 69.8% of men. Fifty-nine percent of women reported some legal concern with the top responses of:

- Accessing military benefits (29.4%)
- Divorce, initial filing or modification (23.5%)
- Debt Collector (23.5%)
- Job Problems (23.5%)
- Getting needed medical services (23.5%).

These needs are somewhat different from the top five needs reported by the male subset of veteran respondents, which suggests the extent to which female veterans are characterized by distinct post-service needs.

Service Providers

Geographic Distribution- Service providers self-reported the counties their organizations serve. 12% reported statewide services to all 16 Maine counties, whereas 88% reported service tailored to more particular geographic areas. Of those service providers who target more specific geographic areas, 35% served the highest per capita counties of Lincoln, Piscataquis, Sagadahoc and Washington Counties and 75% served the highest real number veteran population counties of Cumberland, York, Penobscot and Kennebec.

The survey did not ask respondents to classify the depth or breadth of service offered in each county, so we are unable to evaluate the extent to which an organization's service population parallels the statewide population distribution. In rural states such as Maine, where the average trip between towns in the northern county of Aroostook may be upwards of three hours, serving an entire county may not guarantee that resources are accessible to all veterans in that county who may need assistance.

Types of service- 56% percent of service provider respondents provide services to only veterans. Of those providers, the predominant service provided was mental health services (68% of providers). This is followed by case management (50% of providers) and housing support (47.5% of providers).

Of the 44% of providers who serve veterans only as a portion of their target population, the predominant service provided was case management (51.9% of providers), followed by education support (48.1% of providers) and employment counseling (40.7% of providers).

Service providers identified services they provide for veteran clients from the following list:

- Education support services (31.3%)
- Employment counseling (29.9%)
- Housing Support (38.8%)
- Housing units (14.9%)
- Health Services (23.9%)
- Mental health services (53.7%)
- Recreational/Experiential (13%)
- Veteran Organization/post (11.9%)
- Case management services (50.7%)
- Children and family support (23.9%)
- Financial counseling (16.4%)
- Veterans' Benefits support (40.3%)
- Elder support services (9.0%)

Screening Clients- Of the providers who serve veterans as a subset of their target population, 35% did not screening for military service. The remaining 64.5% asked some variation of the question, “Have you ever served in the military?” as a part of their intake procedure. Of all providers surveyed, 70.8% required proof of military service before they could begin working with a client. 57.1% of all service providers indicated that their agencies did not have income eligibility rules, and the 42% of providers that *did* have income eligibility rules used different measures (such as income relative to area median income vs. income relative to the federal poverty guidelines) to determine eligibility.

Overall, Pine Tree Legal did its best to poll a representative sample of the veteran population and social service providers, but this is by no means an exhaustive account of all veteran perspectives and provider priorities or practices.

END NOTES

ⁱ The Project CHALENG Report notes that several of the top needs among veterans could be addressed through legal representation, but the report does not make a direct connection to legal assistance. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. “Homeless Veterans.”

<http://www.va.gov/homeless/chaleng.asp>.

ⁱⁱ Estimates calculated from 2010 Census Bureau data and 2007-2010 Department of Veterans Affairs data.

U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. “Maine Quick Facts.” Accessed May 2013.

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/23000.html>.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. “Veteran Population.” Accessed May 2013. http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. “Profile of Sheltered Homeless Veterans for FY 2009 and 2010.” September 2012. Accessed May 2013.

http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Homeless_Veterans_2009-2010.pdf

^{iv} U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development & U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. “Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.” 2010.

<http://www.ncdsv.org/images/HUD->

[VA_VeteranHomelessnessSuppRepAnnualHomelessAssessmentReportToCongress_2010.pdf](http://www.ncdsv.org/images/HUD-VA_VeteranHomelessnessSuppRepAnnualHomelessAssessmentReportToCongress_2010.pdf)

^v Maine State Housing Authority. “2012 Homeless Point in Time Survey - Statewide.” January 25, 2012.

<http://www.mainehousing.org/docs/homeless/report-homelesspointintime2012.pdf?sfvrsn=8>

^{vi} Maine State Housing Authority. “2013 Homeless Point in Time Survey - Statewide.” January 30, 2013.

<http://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/homeless/2013-homeless-point-in-time.pdf?sfvrsn=6>

^{vii} ABC News. “US Veterans: By the Numbers.” November 11, 2011. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-veterans-numbers/story?id=14928136#1>

^{viii} U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee Chairman’s Staff. “Broken Promise: The Need to Improve Economic Security for Veterans.” November 11, 2011. http://www.jec.senate.gov/public/?a=Files.Serve&File_id=628ca26b-7433-4fca-8f53-aa713eb3e756

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development & U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. “Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.” 2010.

<http://www.ncdsv.org/images/HUD->

[VA_VeteranHomelessnessSuppRepAnnualHomelessAssessmentReportToCongress_2010.pdf](http://www.ncdsv.org/images/HUD-VA_VeteranHomelessnessSuppRepAnnualHomelessAssessmentReportToCongress_2010.pdf)

^{ix} As of April 1, 2013 70.8% of claims for service connected compensation have been pending a decision for more than 125 days. The percentage of pending claims has not dropped below 67% in 2013. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. “2013 Monday Morning Workload Reports.” <http://www.vba.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/index.asp>

^x 20% of 18-24 year old male veteran struggle with unemployment. Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Employment situation of Veterans Summary.” March 20, 2013. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.toc.htm>

^{xi} Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, Title 38, United States Code Sections 4301-33. &

^{xii} Maine State Service Member Civil Relief Act, Title 37-B§389A & Federal Service Member Civil Relief Act, 50 USC § 301.

^{xiii} U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. “Homeless Veterans.”

http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/chaleng/CHALENG_Report_Seventeenth_Annual.pdf

^{xiv} Department of Veteran Affairs & Veterans Health Administration. “Homeless Veterans Legal Referral Process.”

September 6, 2011. https://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2449

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} United States Department of Labor. “Urban and Non-Urban Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP) Homeless Female Veterans and Homeless Veterans with Families” (HFVWF) (Updated 5/15/2013).

<http://www07.grants.gov/search/search.do;jsessionid=R82pRpSV8FhyxMyYHKyvhTT1hVT16XqG1FTQKkVYpVWShT9fqh5Ll493478300?oppId=234813&mode=VIEW> Emphasis added.

^{xvii} Maine Justice Action Group. “Justice for All: A report of the Justice Action Group.” Statewide Access to Justice Planning Initiative. October 10, 2007. <http://mbf.org/sites/default/files/JAGReportExecutiveSummary12-17-07.pdf>

^{xviii} Ibid.

^{xix} Ibid.

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- ^{xx} National Legal Aid & Defender Association, "Launch of the Gideonat50 Website," June 11, 2013. <http://www.nlada100years.org/>
- ^{xxi} U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. "Secretary Shinseki Details Plan to End Homelessness for Veterans." November 3, 2009. <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1807>
- ^{xxii} Burt, Martha R. & Colleagues. 2005. *Strategies for Preventing Homelessness*. (p. iv) <http://www.urban.org/publications/1000874.html> as cited in; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing. "HUD-VASH Resource Guide for Permanent Housing and Clinical Care." http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Center/144_HUD-VASH_Book_WEB_High_Res_final.pdf.
- ^{xxiii} U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development & The US Department of Veterans Affairs. 2009. *Veteran Homelessness: A supplemental report to the 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/2009AHARveteransReport.pdf>
- ^{xxiv} Estimates calculated from 2010 Census Bureau data and 2007-2010 Department of Veterans Affairs data. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. "Maine Quick Facts." Accessed May 2013. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/23000.html>.
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. "Veteran Population." Accessed May 2013. http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp
- ^{xxv} U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing. "HUD-VASH Resource Guide for Permanent Housing and Clinical Care." http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Center/144_HUD-VASH_Book_WEB_High_Res_final.pdf.
- U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program. "Program Guide." September 12, 2012. http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/SSVF/Final_Draft_of_Program_Guide_September_12_2012.pdf
- ^{xxvi} This reasoning is based on the research discussed in Culhane et al. "Public service reductions associated with placement of homeless persons with severe mental illness in supportive housing." *Housing Policy Debate*. (Vol. 13, Iss. 1, 2002).
- ^{xxvii} Maine Justice Action Group. "Justice for All: A report of the Justice Action Group." Statewide Access to Justice Planning Initiative. October 10, 2007.
- ^{xxviii} U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness." 2010. http://www.ich.gov/PDF/OpeningDoors_2010_FSPPreventEndHomeless.pdf.
- ^{xxix} Legal Services Corporation. "Congress Votes for \$348 Million in LSC Funding." November 21, 2011. <http://www.lsc.gov/media/press-releases/congress-votes-348-million-lsc-funding>
- ^{xxx} U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. "Veteran Population." Accessed May 2013. http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp
- ^{xxxi} Ibid.

APPENDIX A: VETERAN SURVEY

Veteran Legal Needs Survey

Demographic Information

Pine Tree Legal is conducting a survey of veterans, service members and their families in Maine to determine the legal needs of the extended military community. Presently, there are free legal services in Maine but they do not have the resources to represent everyone.

By completing this survey you are helping Pine Tree Legal and other legal aid providers develop the resources to better serve Maine's veteran and military community.

We appreciate your time and input.

This survey is made possible by funding through the Maine Community Foundation and AmeriCorps VISTA.

*1. When did you serve in the military?

*2. In which branch (or branches) of the United States military have you served? (Check all that apply)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Army | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Force | <input type="checkbox"/> Reserves |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Corps | <input type="checkbox"/> Coast Guard | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Navy | <input type="checkbox"/> National Guard | |

3. Which category below includes your age?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 17 or younger | <input type="radio"/> 50-59 |
| <input type="radio"/> 18-20 | <input type="radio"/> 60-69 |
| <input type="radio"/> 21-29 | <input type="radio"/> 70-79 |
| <input type="radio"/> 30-39 | <input type="radio"/> 80-100 |
| <input type="radio"/> 40-49 | <input type="radio"/> 60 or older |

4. What is your gender?

- Female
 Male

5. How many people currently live in your household?

Veteran Legal Needs Survey

12. If you have your own apartment or house, are you at risk of loosing your housing?

- Yes
- No
- I do not have my own home at this time.

Legal Issue Check list

The items listed below are possible area where an attorney could provide trained assistance. Please indicate all that you have experience in the past year and if it is an ongoing or current problem please call 207-774-8211 and mention you are a veteran.

Veteran Legal Needs Survey

13. Have any of the veterans, servicemembers or their families you have worked with in the last year shared concerns regarding any of the following issues? (Please answer the following based on the types of issues you personally have seen individuals face through your work)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problem accessing military or veteran's benefits. | <input type="checkbox"/> Job Problems (hiring, firing, getting paid the right amount or getting paid on time) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Victim of a scam (including bad checks, email and phone offers) | <input type="checkbox"/> Unwillingness of an employer to accommodate a physical or mental condition that effects one's work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identity theft or other credit problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with returning to a job after deployment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Debt collection (including court hearings and/or phone harassment) | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems getting unemployment compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bankruptcy | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with work-related injury or workers compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting home phone, heat or electric installed or disconnected | <input type="checkbox"/> Federal or State Taxes (filing or getting the earned income credit or refund check) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consumer purchase/sales agreement that didn't work out as expected | <input type="checkbox"/> Issues with collection of state or federal back taxes. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with a landlord, including eviction | <input type="checkbox"/> Child visitation, custody or child support. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe housing (including bed bugs, mold, exposed wires and temperature below 68 degrees) | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce (initial filing or a modification) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foreclosure on the veteran's house or the building in which he or she rents. | <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with guardianship, wills or estates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble paying property taxes. | <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse, dating violence or stalking. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of a rented housing agreement (Including lease modifications, service animals, ramps, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Accused of abuse, dating violence, stalking or facing a protection from abuse order |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination in housing (based on race, gender disability, income, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Notice from DHHS about child abuse substantiation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting or keeping government benefits (General Assistance, Food Stamps, TANF) | <input type="checkbox"/> Notice from DHHS regarding the revocation of license or collection of back child support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting or keeping Social Security (Disability or SSI) | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting needed medical services for yourself or a family member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with an auto purchase or repair | <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal Legal Assistance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessing school services for a child (Including discipline or special ed) | <input type="checkbox"/> DUI, OUI or traffic violation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying or harassment of a child at school | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the Above |

Other (please specify)

Contacting an Attorney

Veteran Legal Needs Survey

14. Have you discussed any of the above matters with Pine Tree Legal Assistance?

Yes

No

If yes, which legal issue?

15. Did you attempt to contact Pine Tree Legal regarding this matter?

Yes

No

16. If No, have you discussed any of the above matters with an attorney?

Yes

No

17. If yes, did the attorney represent you in court or before an administrative board?

Yes

No

Last Page

18. Do you have the contact information for the following Maine Legal Services agencies?

| | Yes | No |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Pine Tree Legal Assistance | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Legal Services for the Elderly | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Disability Rights Center | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Thank you for taking this Survey

Thank you for taking the time to take this survey. Your input will directly effect Pine Tree and other legal providers ability to assist Maine's Military Community.

If you have completed a paper copy of this survey please fax to Rob Liscord, Pine Tree Legal's Veteran Outreach Coordinator Americorp VISTA, at 207-828-2300.

You can also mail the completed survey to:

Pine Tree Legal Assistance

Attn: Rob Liscord

PO BOX 547

Portland, ME 04112

APPENDIX B: SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY

Veteran Service Provider Legal Needs Survey

Organization Information

Pine Tree Legal is conducting a survey of veteran service providers in Maine to determine the legal needs of the extended military community. Presently, there are free legal aid services in Maine but they do not have the resources to represent everyone. By completing this survey you are helping Pine Tree Legal and Maine's Legal Community develop the resources to better serve Maine's veteran and military community.

This survey is made possible by funding through the Maine Community Foundation and AmeriCorps VISTA.

After this survey, if you feel that you have a client who requires legal assistance, please contact Rob Liscord, Veteran Legal Services Outreach Coordinator AmeriCorps VISTA to make a referral (Phone: 207-400-3232).

1. Would you like to receive updates and information about legal resources for Maine's military community? Include your name and email address below and be included in a monthly Maine Military Legal aid E-Newsletter. You will also get access to the Maine Military Legal Aid List Serve to share information about your organization's events and programs.

Name:

Email:

2. What is the name of your organization?

3. What types of services does your agency provide?

Education

Mental Health Services

Financial Counseling

Employment Counseling

Recreational/Experiential

Veterans Benefits Support

Housing Support

Veteran Organization/ Post

Elder Support Services

Housing Units (Dwellings)

Case Management Services

Health Services

Children and Family Support

Other (please specify)

4. In what county (or counties) do you work?

Androscoggin

Knox

Somerset

Aroostook

Lincoln

Waldo

Cumberland

Oxford

Washington

Franklin

Penobscot

York

Hancock

Piscataquis

Kennebec

Sagadahoc

Veteran Service Provider Legal Needs Survey

Intake and Clients Served

5. Does your agency exclusively serve veterans, servicemembers and their families?

- Yes
 No

6. Is some variation of the question "Have you ever served or are you presently serving in the military?" asked of every client presenting for services?

- Yes No

7. Does your agency have income eligibility guidelines?

- Yes No

What Income guide do you use?

8. In your current organization, have you ever or are you presently working with veterans, active duty personnel, Guard, Reserve or their families?

- Yes No

9. Have you worked with individuals who served in combat?

- Yes No

10. Does your agency require proof of military service prior to providing services?

- Yes No

Areas of Legal Need

Veteran Service Provider Legal Needs Survey

11. Have any of the veterans, servicemembers or their families you have worked with in the last year shared concerns regarding any of the following issues? (Please answer the following based on the types of issues you personally have seen individuals face through your work)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problem accessing military or veteran's benefits. | <input type="checkbox"/> Job Problems (hiring, firing, getting paid the right amount or getting paid on time) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Victim of a scam (including bad checks, email and phone offers) | <input type="checkbox"/> Unwillingness of an employer to accommodate a physical or mental condition that effects one's work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identity theft or other credit problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with returning to a job after deployment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Debt collection (including court hearings and/or phone harassment) | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems getting unemployment compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bankruptcy | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with work-related injury or workers compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting home phone, heat or electric installed or disconnected | <input type="checkbox"/> Federal or State Taxes (filing or getting the earned income credit or refund check) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consumer purchase/sales agreement that didn't work out as expected | <input type="checkbox"/> Issues with collection of state or federal back taxes. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with a landlord, including eviction | <input type="checkbox"/> Child visitation, custody or child support. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe housing (including bed bugs, mold, exposed wires and temperature below 68 degrees) | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce (initial filing or a modification) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foreclosure on the veteran's house or the building in which he or she rents. | <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with guardianship, wills or estates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble paying property taxes. | <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse, dating violence or stalking. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of a rented housing agreement (Including lease modifications, service animals, ramps, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Accused of abuse, dating violence, stalking or facing a protection from abuse order |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination in housing (based on race, gender disability, income, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Notice from DHHS about child abuse substantiation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting or keeping government benefits (General Assistance, Food Stamps, TANF) | <input type="checkbox"/> Notice from DHHS regarding the revocation of license or collection of back child support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting or keeping Social Security (Disability or SSI) | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting needed medical services for yourself or a family member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with an auto purchase or repair | <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal Legal Assistance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessing school services for a child (Including discipline or special ed) | <input type="checkbox"/> DUI, OUI or traffic violation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying or harassment of a child at school | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the Above |

Other (please specify)

12. Have you referred any individual for the above matters to Pine Tree Legal Assistance?

Yes

No

Veteran Service Provider Legal Needs Survey

13. If you have not referred these individuals to Pine Tree, have you ever suggested that an individual contact an attorney?

Yes

No

14. Do you have the contact information for the following Maine Legal Services agencies?

| | Yes | No |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Pine Tree Legal Assistance | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Legal Services for the Elderly | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Disability Rights Center | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Legal Understanding

Please rate your understanding of the following legal issues. This information will be used to assess the training needs of agencies working with Veterans.

Veteran Service Provider Legal Needs Survey

15. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how well you feel you understand the following (5 being very well and 1 being not at all).

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The difference between criminal and civil law; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The rights of tenants when getting evicted for non-payment of rent; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The rights of tenants when they are denied housing based on color, race, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, having children, or getting public aid; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The rights of tenants when they have unsafe housing conditions; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The rules on maintaining or getting government benefits; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A consumer's rights when harassed by debt collectors; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The effect that a protection from abuse (a restraining order) has on military service; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The process for changing a child support order; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The court process for initiating or modifying a divorce, child custody or child support order; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The application and appeal process for veteran benefits; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The process for upgrading discharge status; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The unemployment insurance claims process; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The education rights of a child with disabilities; | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Finished

Veteran Service Provider Legal Needs Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Your answer will help to demonstrate the need for expanded legal assistance for Maine's Military Community.

If you have completed a paper copy of this survey please fax to Rob Liscord, Pine Tree Legal's Veteran Outreach Coordinator Americorp VISTA, at 207-828-2300.

You can also mail the completed survey to:

Pine Tree Legal Assistance

Attn: Rob Liscord

PO Box 547

Portland, ME 04112

APPENDIX C: LEGAL AID ORGANIZATIONS IN MAINE

PINE TREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Mission statement: Pine Tree Legal Assistance is a state-wide, non-profit organization committed to providing high quality, free, civil legal assistance to low-income people in Maine. Our mission is to ensure that state and federal laws affecting poor people are enforced while also addressing the systemic barriers to justice that low-income Mainers face. We are committed to ensure that all Mainers have access to justice.

Website: www.ptla.org, www.helpmelaw.org, www.statesidelegal.org, www.kidslegal.org

LEGAL SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY

Mission statement: Since 1974, Legal Services for the Elderly has been helping Maine seniors protect their rights to live independently and with dignity. Legal Services for the Elderly's mission is to provide free, high quality legal services to Maine's socially and economically needy elderly aged 60 and over. While many people recognize income as a barrier to obtaining necessary legal help, many seniors with social needs also face barriers to getting assistance. Social needs include needs caused by non-economic factors such as physical and mental disabilities, language barriers, and cultural, social or geographic isolation.

Website: www.mainelse.org

THE MAINE VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT

Mission statement: The Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project is a non-profit legal aid organization that provides free legal information, assistance and representation to people of low income facing civil legal issues. VLP's legal services are provided entirely by community and attorney volunteers supported and supervised by a small staff. Our mission is to make "justice for all" a reality in Maine by giving people the knowledge, tools and support to be equal participants in our justice system.

Website: www.vlp.org

CUMBERLAND LEGAL AID CLINIC

Mission statement: The Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, a program of the University of Maine School of Law, is a small legal services provider, in which clients are represented by "Student Attorneys," third-year law students specially licensed by the state and federal courts to provide legal services to low-income clients.

Website: <http://mainelaw.maine.edu/programs-centers/clac.html>

DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER

Mission Statement: To enhance and promote the equality, self-determination, independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion of people with disabilities through education, strategic advocacy and legal intervention.

Website: <http://www.drcme.org/>

This report was produced by Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc. with support from the Maine VISTA Program and Stateside Legal.

Robert Liscord currently serves Pine Tree Legal Assistance as the Veteran Outreach Coordinator and paralegal. In this role, he collaborates closely with Pine Tree Legal's Supportive Services for Veteran Families grant partner, Preble Street Resource Center, providing consultations and support for social work staff. Robert also advises staff in Pine Tree Legal's six statewide offices on veteran benefit concerns, produces content for Stateside Legal, and sits on multiple military and veteran community planning committees. In his prior capacity as an AmeriCorps VISTA placed with Pine Tree Legal, Robert developed and disseminated the survey that became the foundation for this report. Robert is a Maine native who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History from Bates College in 2011.

Catherine Elliott works in the central administrative office of Pine Tree Legal Assistance as a Development Assistant. She oversees several Technology Initiative Grants from the Legal Services Corporation that fund content development for Stateside Legal. She also provides grant support to Pine Tree Legal's veteran legal services partnership with Preble Street Resource Center. Prior to this position, Catherine worked with Pine Tree Legal as an independent consultant to report on the organization's intake procedures and capacities. Catherine graduated *summa cum laude* from Bates College in 2012 with a Bachelor of Arts in Politics and Art & Visual Culture.



Thank you for joining our mission of achieving justice for all.