HELPING HOMELESS VETERANS
COMPLY WITH CHILD SUPPORT OBLIGATIONS

ISSUE: Currently, many homeless veterans find that their ability to move into permanent housing is compromised by old fines, debts and other legal judgments. Many of these obligations were incurred while the veteran was homeless, in a phase of active addiction, or otherwise untreated for a serious mental illness. For incarcerated veterans, the growing arrears from unpaid child support can be particularly damaging to their ability to reintegrate into the community.

ACTION: The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the American Bar Association (ABA) have begun a project to work with homeless veterans and their families to address unresolved child support issues. This assistance will also be provided to those at-risk of homelessness as part of an effort to prevent homelessness and additional national and local partners are identified to assist with related family issues that may arise. Models for collaboration will initially be developed at pilot sites.

Site Selection: Urban locations were identified where existing resources, local interest, and current state child support laws offer a reasonable prospect for successful collaboration without the requirement for additional financial support. While the general framework will be the same for all sites, each site will develop activities that fit the mix of services and volunteer resources available at that site. The ten pilot sites are: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New Jersey, San Diego, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

Site Leadership: Leadership will vary locally depending on area resources and interests. Leadership may be drawn from an existing non-profit, experienced with providing assistance to the homeless, a state or local bar association, or a local child enforcement agency. Leadership responsibilities include convening regular meetings that include collaborating agencies and stakeholders and providing or locating volunteers to assess and assist homeless veterans who need help renegotiating, as appropriate, child support obligations.

Client Eligibility: Veterans currently enrolled with VA specialized homeless services will be eligible for services. Initially, referrals will be generated by VA residential homeless programs, the VA’s Health Care for Reentry Veterans, or the VA’s soon to be established Supportive Services for Veterans Families. Drawing from this relatively stable population of homeless and at-risk veterans, who are connected to ongoing rehabilitation and support services, offers the continuity and motivation necessary for a successful resolution of child support issues. As this project develops and capacity increases, a local determination may be made to expand the target population to include additional groups of homeless and at-risk veterans from other referral sources.
Project Activities:

- **Referral**: Each VA participating facility will designate a liaison that will be responsible for screening homeless and at-risk veterans for eligibility and referral. This liaison will monitor the veteran’s ongoing involvement with the child support renegotiation process. The liaison will be the VA’s point of contact for this program.

- **Assessment**: Working with the local child support agencies, trained volunteer(s) will conduct initial assessments. This assessment will determine whether the veteran meets criteria for renegotiation of child support payments and what level of assistance would be required.

- **Services to be Offered**: Homeless and at-risk veterans will be able to receive no-cost guidance on their child support cases. This guidance will come from either trained volunteers, attorney supervised legal clinics, or pro bono attorneys identified with the assistance of ABA. The complexity of the case will determine the type of assistance.

- **Staffing and Training**: Training and ongoing supervision would largely be conducted by local attorneys (identified with the assistance of the ABA) and HHS child support enforcement agencies. Their expertise enables them to describe local laws and procedures for renegotiating child support. VA will be responsible for working with the veteran involved in these proceedings so that he/she continues to pursue their treatment and rehabilitation goals.

- **Coordination with other service providers**: Site specific needs are likely to be identified as there are more in-depth discussion with site partners. Addressing domestic violence, including ensuring custodial parent safety, will be one of the site specific issues addressed as well coordination with local homelessness coalitions.

**PROJECT OUTCOMES:**

Several outcomes to measure the effectiveness of this collaborative effort have been identified although evaluation plans are still being developed.

- Recidivism should decrease.
- Compliance with child support payment should improve.
- Time formally employed should increase.
- Time housed should increase.
- Constructive family communication should increase.