Lawsuit Filed Against the Veterans Administration on Behalf of Severely Disabled Homeless Vets

Last week, Inner City Law Center filed a class action lawsuit in Federal Court on behalf of thousands of severely disabled homeless veterans in the LA area. The suit contends that by failing to use the Westwood VA campus as a home for disabled veterans, the VA is violating the specific purpose for which that land was deeded to the United States in 1888. The suit also contends that the VA’s benefits program discriminates against veterans with severe mental disabilities. A robust body of research has established that homeless individuals with severe mental disabilities cannot access necessary medical and mental services without stable living conditions combined with supportive treatment services. Although the VA has recognized the importance of such supportive housing for seriously disabled homeless veterans, it has refused to offer them to plaintiffs and other disabled veterans in Los Angeles and around the country.

Inner City Law Center is part of a large team working on this case, including the ACLU of Southern California acting as lead counsel, Professor Gary Blasi, Professor Lawrence Tribe, Ron Olson, and attorneys from Arnold & Porter.

Click here to see the complaint. Click here to see a news story about the case. Click here to read the NY Times editorial in support of the case.

Eleventh Annual Awards Luncheon-June 21, 2011

Justice Carlos R. Moreno, the international law firm of O’Melveny & Myers LLP and attorney Paul Salvaty will be honored at our Annual Awards Luncheon. This year’s event will be held on Tuesday, June 21, from 12 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the historic Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. More than 300 people from the legal, political, and corporate communities are expected to attend the luncheon. Justice Moreno is being honored for his distinguished history of protecting human rights, securing civil liberties, and promoting social justice and O’Melveny & Myers and Paul Salvaty are being honored for their extraordinary pro bono accomplishments. Click here to read more.

To become a sponsor or purchase tickets click here.

For more information, please contact Harry Batt at (213) 891-3203 or via e-mail at HBatt@innercitylaw.org.

Removing Barriers to Housing the Chronically Homeless

It is now well-established that the solution to housing people who are chronically homeless (those who have a disability and have been living on the streets for more than one year) is permanent supportive housing (PSH). For the past two years, Inner City Law Center has been in the forefront of a variety of partners, including the United Homeless Healthcare Partners, advocating for PSH, particularly using Section 8 rental subsidies to address homelessness. Now, the Housing Authority
of the City of Los Angeles is proposing changes that would adopt many of our recommendations and would result in hundreds, perhaps thousands of people who are chronically homeless becoming eligible for PSH.

Permanent supportive housing is different from the traditional approach to homelessness because it is permanent housing, rather than temporary or shelter housing. In addition, supportive services such as primary health care, mental health care and substance abuse treatment are provided at or very near the building. This model has been effective everywhere it has been tried, stably housing over 85% of people who were chronically homeless. Federal rental subsidies pay most of the rent. The most prevalent rental subsidy is the Section 8 voucher which allows the eligible tenant to pay only 30% of his or her income on rent. However, until recently, most people who are chronically homeless were not eligible for Section 8 vouchers because the Housing Authority’s eligibility criteria was too exclusionary—they screened out people who are chronically homeless instead of screening them in. The Housing Authority’s eligibility criteria was far stricter than required by HUD which oversees Section 8. Last fall, ICLC and UHHP proposed a menu of reforms that would remove those eligibility barriers. On June 28, the Housing Authority is holding a hearing to adopt many of our proposals. If adopted, the reforms would allow hundreds, perhaps thousands of Los Angeles’ 12,000 chronically homeless to be eligible for PSH.

About Inner City Law Center

Inner City Law Center has been serving the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and families in Los Angeles County since 1980. Founded on the basic principle that every human being should be treated with dignity and respect at all times, ICLC, through its staff of more than 30 attorneys, advocates, tenant organizers, social workers, and other professionals, provides free legal representation and social service advocacy to over 2,000 homeless and working poor clients each year.

As the only full-time provider of legal services headquartered on Skid Row, ICLC is widely recognized for its expertise in housing issues, as well as government and veterans benefits.

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