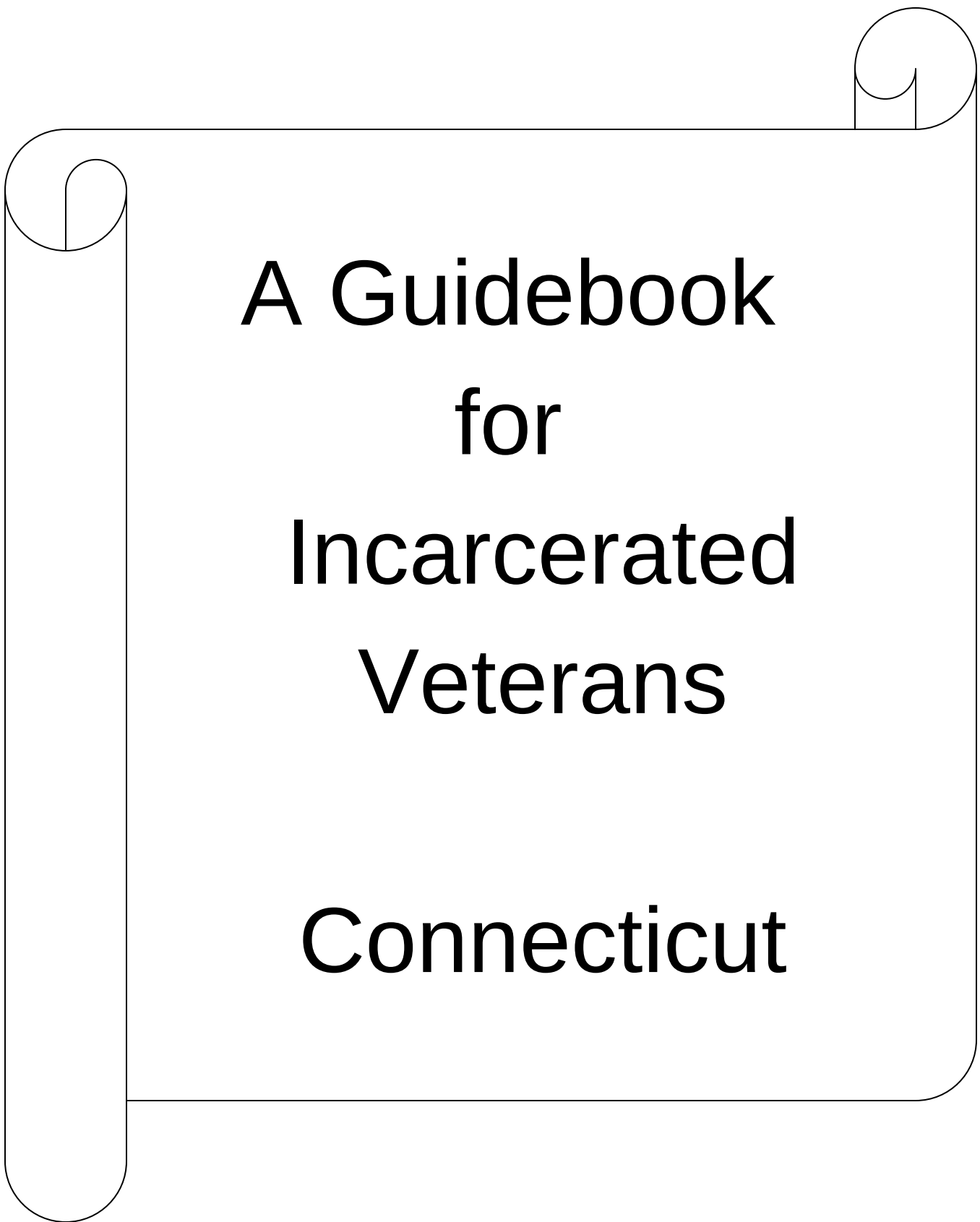




A Guidebook for Incarcerated Veterans Connecticut

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to recognize and thank: 1) the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans which provided basic concepts and core information for this guide through its “Planning for Your Release” guide funded by the U.S. Department of Labor; 2) the Veterans Incarcerated Workgroup of Walla Walla, Washington, for the concept of state-specific information in its “Guidebook for Incarcerated Veterans” and for allowing the use of its guide as a template for this publication; 3) Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. for developing the first incarcerated veterans guidebook, which has inspired and informed subsequent efforts; and 4) We also appreciate any public domain and agency resources included in the guidebook.

This handbook also contains information taken from the National H.I.R.E. Network’s Resources and Assistance webpage (www.hirenetwork.org). The National H.I.R.E. Network’s mission is to increase the number and quality of job opportunities available to people with criminal records by improving public policies, practices, and public opinion.

Agency staff names and addresses, phone numbers and website addresses change. If you attempt to contact one of the resources in this guidebook and it is not current, do your best to obtain the current information through phone information or a Google web search. To perpetuate the value of this document, we respectfully request that if you discover any incorrect, conflicting, or out-of-date information in this Guidebook please send the discrepancies, and updated information if you have it, to:

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SECTION I

USING THIS GUIDE AND SEEKING HELP

This guide is for you to use to plan for your release and to keep as a reference after your release. It includes addresses, phone numbers, and web sites that you can use to find out about programs and other help available after your release. You may want to ask a friend or family member to help you find the information you need if you don't have phone or internet access. Keep in mind that **this guide does not include all of the services available**. What is available in one area may be different from what is available in another, so be sure to check with local resources to learn about services in your area.

While you are in prison, find out which unit in your facility can help you plan for your release (often the education or transfer unit). Classes may be offered so you can work on skills development and prepare for life after release. **You don't want to risk homelessness once you are released, so take advantage of the opportunities available to you.**

Begin thinking about what specifically you will need upon release. Ask yourself these kinds of questions: Will I need housing? Will I need medical, substance abuse, or mental health care? Do I need to learn a job skill? Do I have any other legal issues, such as child support? How do I restart my VA checks or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?

Make a list of your needs. Remember that this is just a tool to help you get organized. A sample list might look like this:

- ☐ I need a place to live.
- ☐ I need a job.
- ☐ I need clothing to wear to work.
- ☐ I need to reinstate my VA service-connected disability compensation
- ☐ I need to find out what benefits I can get as a veteran.
- ☐ I want to get addictions treatment.
- ☐ I owe child support.

Think about your list as you read through this guide. Who do you think can help you with each of your needs? Is there one organization that may be able to work with you, on many different things, or do you need to contact several agencies? Keep track of the steps you take, including the dates and names of people you contact for information or assistance.

Although this guide provides *national and state* addresses for many organizations, we recommend you **check your phone book for local, county, and state agencies that know what help is available in your area.**

When writing a letter to request information, **be clear.** Keep your letter short, to the point, and write legibly. Include the following information:

- ☐ Your name and contact information.
- ☐ A brief statement about your current situation.
- ☐ Your specific request.
- ☐ What you have done so far (Example: I have written to _____X_____ organization and they suggested I contact you).
- ☐ Any restrictions for mailings (Example: Mail with staples or paper clips will not be accepted by my prison facility).

When contacting an agency for help by mail, email or phone, **be persistent and polite** in order to get results. Ask questions if information is not clear to you. Remember that many organizations are staffed by volunteers who are eager to help, but may not have the answers you are looking for. If **someone cannot help you, ask about who can.**

The Internet can also be helpful to find information about VA benefits and community resources in your area. This guide includes web addresses, when available. If computer access is not available at your facility, you can visit the public library after release. Computer access may also be provided at local DOL *Connecticut Works* center, or at a regional Workforce Investment Board One-Stop center.

Section II of this guide provides information about assistance for specific needs.

Section III covers basic information about seeking VA benefits. At the end is a **Checklist** that summarizes each section of this guide.

SECTION II

HELP FOR VETERANS

This section includes resources that can help you get back on your feet. Remember to check the phone book for local, county, and state agencies that know what services are available in the area to assist you. Some organizations may have waiting lists, require an interview, or have specific rules about whom they serve. It is best if you **start asking about services and requirements now**, so that you will be prepared when you are released. You may even ask if your name can be put on a waiting list when you get closer to your release date.

TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

Crisis and other toll-free numbers are often listed in the front cover or first few pages of the phone book. You may also want to check under "Social Services" in the blue or yellow pages for hotlines and local numbers.

- **US Department of Veterans Affairs** — www.va.gov
 - ✓ Benefits: 1-800-827-1000
 - ✓ Medical Centers: 1-877-222-8387 or www.connecticut.va.gov
 - ✓ Persian Gulf War Helpline: 1-800-749-8387
- **Focus On Recovery Helpline** - A 24-hour national alcohol and drug abuse addiction and treatment hotline: 1-800-888-9383
- **National AIDS Hotline** - Talk to someone who knows about HIV / AIDS and can tell you about AIDS services in your city or state: 1-800-822-7422
- **National Coalition for Homeless Veterans** — www.nchv.org, 1-800-838-4357
- **National Suicide Prevention Hotline** - 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

WHERE TO START

Check the local phone book yellow pages under "Homeless" or "Social Service Organizations" for a list of many local organizations that offer different services, which may include clothing, public transportation tokens, emergency shelter, and more.

You may need to contact several agencies to find all the services you need. Services provided by *government* agencies are listed in the blue pages found near the front of the phone book. Check with your local Public Assistance Office to find out what programs are available and what their guidelines are. We have included some guidance below, but your local organizations are your best resources. **Remember, it never hurts to ask!**

Ask about the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP). The Connecticut Department of Labor, in partnership with VA and others, is interested in engaging veterans prior to their release to assure that they are promptly connected with needed programs and services for which they are eligible.

- Every **VA Medical Center** has a **Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Coordinator** who is responsible for helping homeless veterans access VA and community-based care to end homelessness among veterans. The HCHV program provides outreach, clinical assessments and referrals for medical and mental health care, long-term transitional residential assistance, case management and employment assistance with linkage to permanent housing. The HCHV Coordinator (Preston Maynard) in Connecticut can be contacted at (203) 479-8041 or at www1.va.gov/homeless/page.cfm?pg=21.
- **Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs (CT DVA)** provides assistance with Veterans benefits and entitlements information, VA claims process, representation and advocacy, Veterans Home for those in need of residential rehabilitation services. Call 1-800-550-0000, (860) 529-2571, or go to www.ct.gov/ctva.
- **Salvation Army** - provides services, including shelter and transitional housing, for homeless individuals and families. For local services and information contact: The

Salvation Army, Southern New England Division, 855 Asylum Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105 (860) 543-8400 <http://www1.salvationarmy.org>

- **United Way** - provides a variety of services through local organizations. Check the phone book for a local post or locate local organizations online at www.ctunitedway.org.
- **INFOLINE** – An important source to find community agencies that can help you get what you need can be accessed at www.infoline.org/.
- **Local churches and faith-based organizations**, such as Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, and Volunteers of America, may have a variety of programs to assist you. Find these organizations by calling your county or city Department of Social Services. Check the blue pages of the phone book for the number.

HOUSING

It is important to know that you have a place to go when released. The first step in returning to the community is finding a place to stay. This section includes ways to locate emergency shelter, transitional programs, and permanent housing assistance. Transitional or temporary housing can serve as a step toward full independence upon your release. However, there are often waiting lists for housing assistance programs, so you should ask about applying as soon as possible. If you are released and find yourself homeless, emergency assistance is available.

Emergency and Transitional Housing

- **Connecticut Coalition for the Homeless** has a directory of all emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in the state. The list can be accessed online at www.cceh.org.
- **VA Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program** provides transitional housing for veterans who are homeless through partnerships with non-VA providers. There are 102 transitional beds available at 9 locations throughout Connecticut. To find out about eligibility and admission requirements for these programs, contact the

VA Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Coordinator at 114-152 Boston Post Road, West Haven, CT 06516 or John Chiechi 203-479-8042.

- To find homeless veteran service providers in your area, call 1-800- VET-HELP, write to NCHV, 333½ Pennsylvania Ave., SE Washington, DC 20003-1148, or go to www.nchv.org.

Long-term or Permanent Housing

Public housing waiting lists can be long, but the length of time can vary from place to place. Even if you are not sure where you want to live yet, apply to get on the waiting list so that you have as many options as possible. To learn how to apply, contact the local housing authority listed in the phone book blue pages under "Local Government, Public Housing Authority".

FINDING & KEEPING A JOB

Finding a job may be hard and can seem overwhelming, but it is possible and very important! When released you may find that you are completely starting over. You should ask for job counseling and training while incarcerated so you are prepared to work when released. **Don't wait** until you get out to start thinking about what you will do. **Start planning now!**

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

- **Department of Labor *Connecticut Works Centers***
(<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/ctworks/ctworks.htm>) provide all the information, technology and services business needs to thrive, and job seekers need to achieve successful careers. They represent a unique concept in the labor market - everything in one place. *Connecticut Works Centers* are delivered to customers in a variety of ways, including:
 - o Career Assistance
 - o Self-Service Resources
 - o Referral and Placement Services
 - o Job Search Support
 - o Education and Training

- o Free Workshops
- o Career Counseling
- o Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Connecticut Works Centers are located in Bridgeport, Danbury, Danielson, Enfield, Hamden, Hartford, Meriden, New Britain, New London, Norwich, Torrington, Waterbury, and Willimantic. Office addresses and directions may be accessed at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/ContactInfo/Default.htm>.

- **Regional Workforce Investment Boards** coordinate regional workforce development, planning and programs. The Boards, with the Connecticut Department of Labor, other State agencies and private organizations, form a statewide partnership to achieve comprehensive workforce development in the state. Important employment and training services are funded through the Boards, and these services are accessed at regional One-Stop Centers. The location of the five regional boards in Connecticut can be found at www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wia-investbds.html. The one-stops provide:
 - o Free use of computers, copiers, phones, faxes and other career resources
 - o Internet access to jobs
 - o Job referral and placement
 - o Classes on how to get and keep a job
 - o Information on the fastest growing jobs and wages
 - o Referral to training and other community services
 - o Translation services

- **Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists** help veterans find and keep jobs. LVERs and DVOPs are located at the local *Connecticut Works Centers*. LVERs assist veterans with employment and training needs, offer case management and counseling services, and are responsible for veterans programs in the local *Connecticut Works Centers*. DVOP Specialists provide outreach, case management, vocational guidance and counseling services to veterans in the local offices. To find

a LVER or DVOP near you, search the blue pages of the phone book under or go to <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/veterans/vetreps.htm>.

- **Important Local Community Providers.** Community agencies are available to assist individuals with criminal records find employment.
 - **Community Partners in Action-Coalition Employment Services** provides assessment of individual's employment strengths and weaknesses, needs, job readiness, interests, and degree of motivation. Staff then supply the resources to help meet their needs and/or interest, and process them for placement into employment and/or educational/vocational training. Contact CPA Coalition Employment Services at 119 Washington St., Hartford, CT 06106 (860)-543-8930.
 - **STRIVE/Fairfield County Employment Services** provides participants with tools to navigate today's ever-changing job market to achieve their best economic and social capabilities. STRIVE's mission is to demonstrate the impact that attitudinal training and post-placement support have on the long-term permanent employment of inner city adults and youth. STRIVE begins preparing participants for the work force through a strict, demanding three week workshop (120 hours) which focuses on the prerequisites for successful entry level employment. A key element of STRIVE programs is follow-up in which contact is maintained with clients for two years following their graduation from the basic workshop. STRIVE also helps its graduates with issues that are not job related. The most common issues are continued education, health problems and family matters.

STRIVE/Fairfield County Employment Services
350 Fairfield Avenue.
Bridgeport , CT 06604
203-953-3233; 203-334-5627 ext 414
203-334-0058 fax

- **STRIVE/South Arsenal Neighborhood Development (SAND) Corporation** is a three-week, 40 hours/week intensive training program, combining specific instruction on how to find a job, proper work-site behaviors and unspoken

rules, introduction to computers, time and financial budgeting, and information on continuing education opportunities while employed, with intense practice with the interviewing process. Once the three weeks training is complete, STRIVE/SAND continues to work with the participant in completing all job search activities, wardrobe update for appropriate attire, planning transportation and child-care services, and job placement. Peer support groups and additional counseling or follow-up is also available to all program graduates.

Contact:

STRIVE

2550 Main St.

Hartford, CT 06120

860-278-8460 ext 23

860-297-0074 fax

E-Mail: info@sandcorporation.com

- o **STRIVE/New Haven**, in addition to developing appropriate attitudes and basic job search and retention skills, seeks to introduce participants to the demands of the workplace. The training sessions take place during work hours, five days per week for three weeks. The goal of the training is to rid participants of negative behavior and pessimistic mindsets, while building the necessary attitude to gain employment, particularly in service industries requiring interpersonal skills.

Contact:

STRIVE

746 Chapel St, Suite-301

New Haven, CT 06510

203-777-1720

203-777-3075 fax

E-Mail: info@strivenewhaven.com

- **Federal Bonding Program**

The Federal Bonding Program provides fidelity bonding insurance coverage to individuals with criminal histories and other high-risk job applicants who are qualified, but fail to get jobs because regular commercial bonding is denied due to their backgrounds.

Why bonding is needed -Job seekers who have in the past committed a fraudulent or dishonest act, or who have demonstrated other past behavior which casts doubt upon their credibility or honesty, often experience a special barrier to gaining employment due to their personal backgrounds. Such persons are routinely classified as “at-risk” job applicants when their past life experience raises an obstacle to their future ability to secure employment. More specifically, *employers view these applicants as being potentially untrustworthy workers*. This fear is further heightened by the fact that Fidelity Bond insurance commercially purchased by employers to protect against employee dishonesty usually will not cover those at risk – these persons are designated by insurance companies as being “NOT BONDABLE.” As a result, at-risk job applicants are routinely denied employment. **Ex-offenders**, including anyone with a record of arrest, conviction, or imprisonment, and anyone who has ever been on probation or parole, are at-risk job applicants. Others, similarly at-risk and NOT BONDABLE **are ex-addicts** (persons with a history of alcohol and drug abuse), persons having a **poor credit record**, or who have declared bankruptcy, **economically disadvantaged persons who lack a work history**, and individuals who were **dishonorably discharged** from the military. Other job seekers also can be classified as at-risk if bonding can eliminate the barrier to their employment.

What is a Fidelity Bond? -Fidelity bonding is a form of business insurance usually purchased to indemnify employers for loss of money or property sustained through the dishonest acts of their employees (i.e. theft, forgery, larceny, and embezzlement). This “employee dishonesty insurance” is generally considered a good business management practice, and is purchased by many employers. However, while other types of insurance set premiums that vary according to the degree of risk, Fidelity Bond premiums are always set based upon taking no risk. As a result, insurance companies usually will not cover at- risk persons under Fidelity Bonds, a practice that has created a special barrier to employment for the growing large number of persons (i.e. ex-addicts, credit risks, etc.) whose personal credibility is questionable due to other dishonest or deviant past acts.

Contact:
Bonding Services Coordinator
Operational support Unit

Connecticut Department of Labor
200 Folly Brook Blvd.
Wethersfield, CT 06109
860-263-6735
860-263-6039 fax
Web Site: <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/busservices/bonding.htm>

- **Tax Credits**

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit to reduce the federal tax liability of private for profit employers to be used as an incentive for employers to hire individuals from eight different targeted groups: TANF recipients, veterans, ex-felons, high risk youth, summer youth, Food Stamp recipients, SSI recipients, and vocational rehabilitation referrals.

WOTC Coordinator
Connecticut Department of Labor Program Support Unit
200 Folly Brook Blvd.
Wethersfield, CT 06109
860-263-6060
Web Site: www.ctdol.state.ct.us/progsupt/taxcredits/wotc.htm

- **Unemployment Insurance Office**

Unemployment compensation is a social insurance program designed to provide benefits to most individuals out of work, generally through no fault of their own, for periods between jobs. In order to be eligible for benefits, jobless workers must demonstrate that they have worked, usually measured by amount of wages and/or weeks of work, and must be able and available for work. The unemployment compensation program is based upon federal law, but administered by states under state law. Forms and information may be obtained at any local One Stop Center and via the internet at the web site listed below.

Contact:
Commissioner
Connecticut Department of Labor
200 Folly Brook Blvd.
Wethersfield, CT 06109
info line-860-263-6785/ 860-256-3800-unemployment insurance office
Web Site: www.ctdol.state.ct.us/progsupt/unempl/unemployment.htm

- The VA's **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment** services help veterans with service-connected disabilities by providing job training and counseling to those who

have an employment handicap. Services include help finding a job, on-the-job training, job development, and vocational training. If you are not eligible for these services, a VA counselor may help you find other options, goals, or programs. Contact your VA Regional Office (VARO) at 1-800-827-1000, or go to <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/ro/rocontacts.htm>.

- Through its **Veterans Industries and Compensated Work Therapy programs**, the VA offers at-risk and homeless veterans help in choosing, getting and keeping competitive jobs in the community. The program is available for veterans currently enrolled in treatment with the VA Connecticut Healthcare System. To learn about the program go to <http://vaww.visn1.med.va.gov>.
- **Connecticut Department of Social Services** has a **Rehabilitation Services** bureau that helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs. The mission of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is to create opportunities which allow individuals with disabilities to live and work independently. There are four components to the Bureau:

1. Vocational Rehabilitation: The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides individualized vocational rehabilitation services to eligible persons with significant physical and mental disabilities, to assist them to prepare for, enter, and maintain competitive employment. To be eligible for the VR program, an individual must have a physical or mental disability that significantly affects their ability to train for, get and keep a job. Vocational rehabilitation services are available through the statewide network of Bureau of Rehabilitation Services offices. For a list of BRS offices, call 1-800-537-2549 or (860) 424-4844.

2. Employment Opportunities Program: The Employment Opportunities Program provides ongoing supports in competitive employment, for individuals with the most significant disabilities who do not meet the eligibility criteria for these supports from other agencies. For information on the Employment Opportunities Program, call 1-800-537-2549 or (860) 424-4860.

3. Independent Living Program: The Independent Living Program oversees five independent living centers that provide independent living services to empower persons with disabilities to maintain personal independence and maximum integration into their community. The centers, which are consumer-controlled and community-based, provide four core services: peer support, information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, and independent living skills training.

Independent living services are available through these independent living centers:

Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC)

238 West Town St, Norwich, CT. 06360

Tel. (860) 823-1898 (V & TDD); Fax: (860) 886-2316 www.dnec.org

Independence Unlimited (IU)

151 New Park Avenue, Suite D, Hartford, CT 06106

Tel. (860) 523-5021 (V); TDD (860) 529-0436; Fax: (860) 523-5603
www.hartfordoffice.com

Center for Disability Rights (CDR)

764A Campbell Avenue, West Haven, CT 06516

Tel. (203) 934-7077 (V); TDD (203) 934-7079; Fax: (203) 934-7078
www.centerfordisabilityrights-ct.org

Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County (DRCFC)

80 Ferry Boulevard, Stratford, Suite 210, CT 06615

Tel:(203) 378-6977 (V); TDD (203) 378-3248; Fax: (203) 375-2748
www.drcfc.org

Independence Northwest (IN)

Route 63 Professional Center

1183 New Haven Road - Suite 200, Naugatuck, CT 06770

Tel. (203) 729-3299 (V); (203) 729-1281 (TDD); Fax: (203) 729-2839

4. Disability Determination Services: Disability Determination Services (DDS) is responsible for determining the eligibility of Connecticut residents for the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security (SSI) programs. These programs provide cash benefits to individuals who are currently unable to engage in gainful employment. DDS can be reached at 1-800-842-8320 or (860) 466-6158.

VA HEALTHCARE

If eligible for veteran's benefits:

- We encourage you to enroll in the VA Health Benefits System as soon as you are released. Every **VA Medical Center** has a **Health Care for Homeless Veterans Coordinator** who helps veterans and their families find resources inside and outside the VA Health Care system. Call 1-203-479-8041 or go to www.connecticut.va.gov, to find the medical center nearest you.

VA MEDICAL CENTERS

VA CONNECTICUT HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Southern Connecticut

West Haven VAMC
950 Campbell Avenue
West Haven, CT 06516
(203) 932-5711

Errera Community Care Center
114 Orange Avenue
West Haven, CT 06516
(203) 931-4064/4035

Northern Connecticut

Newington Campus
555 Willard Avenue
Newington, CT 06111
(860) 666-6951

VA COMMUNITY-BASED CLINICS

Danbury CBOC

7 Germantown Road
Suite 2B
Danbury, CT 06810
Phone: (203) 798-8422

John J. McGuirk Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic

4 Shaw's Cove, Suite-101
New London, CT 06320
Phone: (860) 437-3611

VA Primary Care Clinic

1275 Summer Street, Suite 102
Stamford, CT 06905
Phone: (203) 325-0649
Fax: (203) 325-0865

Waterbury VA Primary Care Clinic

95 Scovill Street
Waterbury, CT 06706
Phone: (203) 465-5292

Windham VA Primary Care Clinic

Windham Hospital
96 Mansfield Street
Willimantic, CT 06226
Phone: (860) 450-7583

Winsted VA Primary Care Clinic

Winsted Health Center
115 Spencer Street
Winsted, CT 06098
Phone: (860) 738-6985

If you are not eligible for veteran's benefits, free or low-cost health care may be available from the following sources:

- **Department of Social Services (DSS)** can tell you where to find health care facilities for the homeless. Check the phone book blue pages under local, city, or county government for the number.
- **National Health Care for the Homeless Council** has a list of health care providers working with homeless people across the nation. For a list of providers in your state, go to www.nhchc.org.
- **Free clinics** are run by many local organizations and communities. Look in the phone book blue pages under "Public Health" to contact local government office for clinics in your area.

If you are not eligible for veterans' benefits, the following sources may be able to tell you where you can go to get mental health services:

- **Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)** can inform you of the location of a community mental health service where you can receive services. DMHAS has a comprehensive locator service on line at www.dmhas.state.ct.us/findingservices.htm that contains a directory of all DMHAS services, a directory of all Local Mental Health authorities, a listing of all DMHAS-run

facilities, and directions to DMHAS agencies and facilities. 1-860-418-7000/1-800-446-7348/TDD-1-860-418-6707.

- **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill** lists community mental health services providers at: www.nami.org, or call 1-800-950-6264.
- **National Mental Health Association** offers support groups, rehabilitation, socialization, and housing services through 340 community organizations located across the country. Call 1-800-969-NMHA, or find a local office online at www.nmha.org.

Special Health Information for Veterans:

- If you think you may be at risk for AIDS and HIV infection after your release, contact the nearest VA Medical Center to get tested, and seek counseling. Those at highest risk for AIDS and HIV infection are:
 - ☐ people who share needles or syringes to inject drugs or steroids;
 - ☐ men who have sex with other men;
 - ☐ those born to mothers who have HIV;
 - ☐ people who received blood transfusions before 1985;
 - ☐ anyone who has sex with anyone who is at risk for HIV / AIDS.
- Veterans, homeless, and incarcerated people are at high risk for **Hepatitis C** (HCV), a serious disease that can cause cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer. If you think you are at risk after your release, contact the nearest VA Medical Center to get tested and seek HCV counseling. You are at risk if:
 - ☐ you ever used a needle to inject drugs;
 - ☐ you had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992;
 - ☐ you were a health care worker and had contact with blood;
 - ☐ you were on long-term kidney dialysis;
 - ☐ your mother had hepatitis C when she gave birth to you.

- The Veterans Health Administration also recommends testing if:

- ☐ you are a Vietnam-era veteran;
- ☐ you have had exposure to blood on your skin;
- ☐ you have had multiple sex partners;
- ☐ you have tattoos or body piercing;
- ☐ you have ever snorted cocaine;
- ☐ you have liver disease;
- ☐ you have a history of drinking a lot of alcohol;
- ☐ you have had an abnormal liver function test.

VETERANS READJUSTMENT AND COUNSELING SERVICE: VET CENTERS

Hartford Vet Center

25 Elm St, Suite A,
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
Phone: (860) 563-8800
FAX: (860) 563-8805

Norwich Vet Center

2 Cliff Street
Norwich, CT 06360
Phone: (860) 887-1755
Fax: (860) 887-2444

New Haven Vet Center

141 Captain Thomas Boulevard
West Haven, CT 06516
Phone: (203) 932-9899
Fax: (203) 937-9419

SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

If eligible for veterans' benefits:

- Contact the West Haven VAMC at (203) 932-5711 or Newington Campus at (860) 666-6951.

If not eligible for veterans' benefits, the following sources may be able to tell you where you can go to get mental health services:

- **Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)** can inform you of the location of a community mental health service where you can receive services. DMHAS has a comprehensive locator service on line at www.dmhas.state.ct.us/findingservices.htm that contains a directory of all DMHAS services, a directory of all Local Mental Health authorities, a listing of all DMHAS-run facilities, and directions to DMHAS agencies and facilities.
- **Focus On Recovery Helpline** - A 24-hour national alcohol and drug abuse addiction and treatment hotline: 1-800-888-9383.

FINANCIAL HELP

- The Soldiers', Sailors' and Marines' Fund (SSMF), administered by the American Legion, provides temporary financial assistance through Fund Representatives that are located in cities throughout the state. Veterans must have an honorable or general discharge and must have served at least 90 days during wartime to be eligible. Information about the SSMF may be accessed at SSMF, 864 Wethersfield Avenue, Hartford, CT 06114 or 1-800-491-4941 or (860) 296-0719. A detailed listing of local Fund Representatives that assist with applications can be found at www.state.ct.us/ssmf/.
- If you are unemployed with little or no income, you may be able to get **food stamps**. Call the toll-free information number at 1-800-221-5689, or find a list of food stamp hotlines for each state at http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/contact_info/hotlines.htm. You can also contact the local Department of Social Services, many drop-in shelters, or legal aid services to ask for an application.

- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** benefits can be applied for before your release, even though you won't receive the benefits until after you are released. Food Stamps can be applied for together with SSI. Normally, it takes about three months to review an application, so apply well before your release date. It is best to get help filling out the application. For detailed information or assistance, call 1-800-772-1213, call or your local Social Security Administration office listed in the phone book blue pages, or go to: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov.ssi>.
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** has a program called Emergency Food and Shelter Program to help prevent homelessness. Contact the local Office of the Mayor *or* United Way to ask who awards this money in your area and what the rules are. 1-800-621-FEMA; TTY 1-800-462-7585 www.fema.gov.

LEGAL HELP

- Most law is state-specific. Most common legal problems are governed by the law in the state where you live or where the problem occurred. When looking for legal help, make sure that information you find applies to your state, or that the lawyer or other service provider is qualified to work in your state.
- **Connecticut Legal Services Network:** Low-income persons needing legal assistance can contact a legal services provider that participates in the Connecticut Legal Services Network. The legal services programs in Connecticut are a group of nonprofit organizations which provide legal assistance in civil matters to low-income persons. Services are free. Eligibility depends upon income, family size, assets and legal issue. The programs work together to advocate for (and with) people who are low income, on a variety of issues. In addition to individual legal advice and representation, the legal services programs help clients, community groups, and providers through free trainings, pamphlets and other information.
www.connlegalservices.org.

How to Get Assistance: Generally, applicants should call Statewide Legal Services first to find out if they qualify for services. Call 1-800-453-3320 or 860-344-0380 between 9am-4pm on Mondays; 9am-7pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays; and

between 9am-3pm on Wednesdays and Fridays. The following persons should call the legal services office closest to them:

- Elder applicants (60 years and older)
- Staff from social service or government agencies

The legal services system includes the following five programs:

Statewide Legal Services

Statewide Legal Services (SLS) is available by phone to clients throughout Connecticut. Generally SLS is the entry point for accessing legal assistance. SLS may provide advice over the phone, mail information, or refer clients to a legal services office or private attorney at no cost to the client. SLS can be reached at 1-800-453-3320 or at www.slsct.org/.

Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.

Connecticut Legal Services (CLS) provides legal representation to low-income persons throughout the state, except those living in the greater Hartford or New Haven areas. www.connlegalservices.org.

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

The Greater Hartford Legal Aid program (GHLA) provides legal representation to low-income persons who live in the greater Hartford area. GHLA can be reached at (860) 541-5000 or at www.ghla.org.

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc. (LAA) provides legal services to low-income persons in the greater New Haven and lower Naugatuck Valley areas. LAA can be reached at (203) 946-4811 or at www.nhlegal.org/.

Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut

The Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut (LARCC) coordinates publications, policy advocacy and staff training for the legal services programs. In addition, LARCC sponsors the Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs (CABHN), a statewide advocacy network. CABHN publishes a free monthly newsletter and conducts community outreach and education. LARCC can be reached at (860) 278-5688 or at www.larcc.org/.

Other legal resources:

- The **American Bar Association** has a web site with guidelines about free legal services and links to directories of legal aid offices and pro-bono programs. Go to: www.abanet.org.
- Lawyers in private practice sometimes volunteer in "pro-bono" programs to take cases for poor clients free of charge. Check the yellow pages to contact your **Local Bar Association** to learn if there is a pro-bono program in your community, or go to www.abanet.org/barserv/stlobar.html.
- **Criminal Record Repository** is the agency that individuals may contact to obtain a copy of their state rap sheet and learn about the process of sealing, expunging or cleaning it up. The criminal record repository can also tell the individual who else is legally entitled to have access to his or her record.

All requests for criminal history information must be made in writing with a \$25 check or money order and Form DPS-846-C which can be downloaded from www.state.ct.us/dps/SPBI.htm.

Contact:

State of Connecticut
Department of Public Safety
State Police Bureau of Identification
1111 Country Club Rd
Middletown, CT 06457-9294

(860) 685-8190/8480

Web Site: www.state.ct.us/dps/SPBI.htm

WOMEN VETERANS

- Most VA **Medical Centers** and readjustment offices have a designated Women Veterans Coordinator to assist women veterans in accessing VA benefit programs and healthcare services. Contact either the West Haven VAMC at (203) 932-5711 or the Newington VA Campus at (860) 666-6951.

SECTION III

SEEKING FEDERAL BENEFITS

The Department of Veterans Affairs publishes a booklet called "**Federal Benefits for Veterans and Their Dependents**" that describes the types of benefits available and lists the addresses and phone numbers for VA facilities nationwide. Write the VA Regional Office (VARO) to request a copy.

U.S. Dept Of Veterans Affairs - Regional Office Hartford

555 Willard Avenue

Newington, CT 06111

Call 1-800-827-1000 or find information about benefits at www.vba.va.gov.

Eligibility for VA Benefits During Incarceration

Veterans incarcerated and incarcerated dependents may apply for the same compensation, dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) – service connected death benefits – and pension benefits as veterans who are not incarcerated. However, Congress restricts the amount of benefits that may be paid to a veteran or dependent while he or she is incarcerated. These benefits are institutionalized as part of law: 38 U.S.C Sec 5313 (a), 38 C.F.R., Sec. 3.665 (a), (d), which reads as follows:

If a veteran is incarcerated as the result of a "felony" conviction as defined by law: "Any offense punishable by death or imprisonment for a term exceeding one year, unless specifically categorized as a misdemeanor under the law of the prosecuting jurisdiction."

Then, the amount paid to a veteran incarcerated for a service-connected disability is generally limited by law to the 10 percent disability rate, or half the amount of the ten percent rate if the veteran's disability rating is 10 percent. (If the veteran is rated before incarceration as 20 percent disabled or higher, he will receive only the amount payable to a 10 percent disabled veteran.) Incarcerated DIC recipients will receive one-half the amount paid to a veteran receiving compensation payments for a 10 percent-rated disability.

A veteran may not receive non-service connected VA pension benefits, or any portion of these benefits, while incarcerated for a felony or misdemeanor. However, his family may receive an apportionment of such benefits under the procedure described above. (See 38 C.F.R. Sec.3.666)

One important requirement for eligibility for VA benefits is that the veteran has to have been issued either an honorable or general discharge, or would have received one if not for re-enlisting. If a veteran had two periods of service, one honorable and the other less than honorable, he may still be eligible for VA benefits based on the honorable period of service.

VA Medical Care can not be provided to veterans in prison, but VA health facilities may provide care to you after your release. Contact 1-877-222-8387 to find the medical center nearest you.

Benefits Payments While Incarcerated

There is a 60-day "grace period" following a conviction when you may still receive full benefits. To avoid an overpayment, it is important that you notify the VARO immediately when you go to prison if you are receiving payments. If you do not notify the VA and receive overpayment, you and your family will lose all financial payments until the debt is paid.

For example, Joe is a veteran who receives a VA pension. He commits a crime, is convicted, and is incarcerated, but doesn't tell the VA right away and keeps getting paid for 6 months. After serving his sentence of 18 months, he is released and applies to the VA to have his pension restarted. He will have an overpayment which must be recovered from the restarted benefits. Until the overpayment is recovered, Joe will have to go without that income.

Your award for compensation or pension benefits should resume from the date you are released, as long as the VA receives notice of release within one year. Form 21-4193, Notice to Department of Veterans Affairs of Veteran or Beneficiary Incarcerated in Penal Institution, available through your counselors should be completed before release, signed by a prison official and submitted to VA Benefits Administration.

Apportionment

Although legally, the veteran can only receive a portion of the full amount payable for his or her disability rating, the remaining balance may be "apportioned to the individual's dependent family". To apply for apportionment, the veteran must send a letter that identifies the veteran and the apportionment claimant and makes it clear they are requesting an apportionment of his VA benefits to the VA Regional Office (VARO) that has jurisdiction over the veteran's case. VA regulations clearly specify this apportionment amount will only go to family members if they can show financial need for such amount. This applies to the spouse, children, or dependent parents who are involved in the application.

In deciding whether any apportionment is appropriate, the amount of the apportionment, and to whom it will go, the following factors are considered:

- The family member's income and living expenses;
- The amount of compensation available to be apportioned;
- The needs and living expenses of other family members; and
- Special needs of any of the family members.

For example: a veteran incarcerated rated as 80 percent disability can only receive the amount he or she would get if he or she were 10 percent disabled. However, his or her family may be apportioned up to 70 percent, the difference of the 80 percent rating. (DIC may also be apportioned with similar restrictions.)

There is a 60-day "grace period" following conviction where the veteran, or Dependency or Indemnity Compensation (DIC) recipient, may still receive full benefits. If the veteran continues to receive benefits after the 60-day period, it will result in an "overpayment". The VA considers it to be the recipient's responsibility and fault if this occurs because the recipient failed to notify the VA of his or her incarceration. Attempts to obtain a waiver in these situations of overpayment are often unsuccessful. As a rule, the veteran loses most, if not all, financial benefits until the VA recovers the entire overpayment. It has also been a standard procedure that the family will not be entitled to receive an apportionment until the debt is completely recovered.

For more information concerning VA debt collection rules that may affect the veteran incarcerated, telephone: 1-800-827-1000 and request a Veterans Service Organization representative or, write to a Veterans Service Organization.

One other relevant restriction on veteran's incarcerated eligibility for service connected disability compensation is that: "No total disability rating based on un-employability, may be assigned to an incarcerated veteran".

It is important to remember that most VA decisions, including those on apportionment, can be appealed to the Board of Veterans Appeals and, if need be, to the Court of Appeal for Veterans Affairs.

Re-starting Benefits at Release

It is important that each disabled veteran receiving compensation or DIC payments promptly notify the VARO. Regular full benefit payments should begin upon release, providing the VA is notified of the veteran's release, including placement within a community treatment center or halfway house in the community, within one year of release. VARO needs formal notification from the prison of your release in order to re-start benefits: The sooner that document is provided to VARO, the sooner VARO can begin to process your request.

Seeking Help After Release

If you would like to get benefits or think you have a pending claim before the VA, it is best to get professional help to assist you.

Many Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) have trained staff who can help you with your VA claim, and can legally represent your claim before the VA. Some also help homeless and at-risk veterans find the support services they need. You can contact any VSO listed in the Guidebook to learn an office near you.

Seeking Benefits On Your Own

Although we encourage you to seek the aid of a service representative, you may choose to apply for VA benefits on your own. Write your local VA Regional Office or find the forms online at: www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms1.htm. You can also apply for certain benefits online at: <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>.

HELP SEEKING BENEFITS

If you would like to get benefits or think you have a pending claim before the VA, it is best to get professional help to assist you. The Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) has a cadre of Service Officers that are located in each Congressional District. Veterans Service Officers are trained and experienced in veterans law, and are accredited by VA to provide advocacy representation in the preparation, presentation and prosecution of claims before VA.

The following is a listing of OA&A offices:

Veterans Service Officer, Supervisor

P.O. Box 310909 Rm. 2E 3128
Newington, CT 06131-0909
Tel. (860) 594-6604 or 6605 or 6606
Fax. (860) 667-1081

1st. District:

Veterans Service Officer

Connecticut Dept. of Veterans' Affairs
287 West St. Bldg. # 7
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
Tel. (860) 721-5893 or 5894
Fax. (860) 721-5843

2nd. District:

Veterans Service Officer

100 Broadway Street, Rm-305
Norwich, CT 06360
Tel. (860) 887-9162-ext. 12/13
Fax. (860) 885-0644

3rd. District:

Veterans Service Officer

487 B Campbell Ave.
West Haven, CT 06516
Tel. (203) 931-0460
Fax. (203) 931-0504

4th. District:

Veterans Service Officer

75 Middle ST.
Bridgeport, CT 06604
Tel. (203) 336-2570 Fax. (203) 336-2569

5th District:

Veterans Service Officer

Rowland State Government Center
55 West Main Street, Suite 140
Waterbury, CT 06702
Tel. (203) 805-6340
Fax. (203) 805-6341

- National Veterans Service Organizations such as the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Veterans (AMVETS), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and American Legion (AL) also provide advocacy representation to veterans and their families. A local representative may be found in the blue pages under US Government in the telephone book.

- Although we encourage you to seek the aid of a service representative, you may choose to apply for VA benefits on your own. Write the VARO or find the forms online at: www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms1.htm. You can also apply for certain benefits online at: <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>.

Below are brief descriptions of forms needed to file for certain VA benefits. Be sure you use a return address where mail will get to you as quickly as possible. Make photocopies of all forms for your records before sending your packet to the VARO nearest you.

- VA Form 21-526 - Application for Compensation or Pension- must be filed to apply for compensation or pension. Mail your DD-214 and the following forms to the VARO nearest your release destination 30 to 45 days before your release.
- VA Form 21-4138 - Statement in Support of Claim - lets you explain why you deserve the benefits you are asking for because of your disability or disorder. It is best to have an experienced service representative help you complete the form.
- VA Form 21-4142 - Authorization for Release of Information - If you have received medical or mental health care, that may be relevant to your claim, from anyone other than a VA Medical Facility, you need to fill out a VAF 21-4142 giving permission for release of medical records to the VA.
- VA Form 10-10EZ - Enrollment for Medical Benefits - is used by the VA to determine if you can receive medical benefits. Complete the form and bring it with you to the VA medical facility where you will seek evaluation for treatment.
- VA Form 28-1900 - Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Veterans - is needed to apply for the vocational rehabilitation program to help veterans who were disabled during their service reach maximum independence in daily living, to learn the skills needed to get a job, and to find and keep a job. Send Form 28-1900 to the VARO in your area 10 to 15 days before your release.
- VA Form 70-3288 - Request for and Consent to Release of Information from Claimant's Records - is used to get records relevant to your claim from VA facilities (regional offices, medical centers, outpatient clinics, and vet centers). Request a fee waiver under section 38 C.F.R. Sec.1.526 (h), which requires the VARO to provide a veteran with one set of his or her records free of charge.

CHECKLIST

Using This Guide

- ☐ Ask about classes or resources to help you plan for your release.
- ☐ Make a list of your needs.
- ☐ Make a list of who may be able to help you.
- ☐ Write letters and/or contact organizations by phone or email.
- ☐ Write down the steps you take so that you do not repeat them.

Just for Veterans

- ☐ Know where to call toll-free for help.
- ☐ Contact organizations about what services they have to offer.
- ☐ Think about your housing needs and gather information about what is available locally.
- ☐ Learn about job resources and create a plan to find a job.
- ☐ Learn about health issues and what services are available.
- ☐ Learn about the resources available for substance abuse and mental health treatment in your area.
- ☐ Learn about your options to get financial help.
- ☐ Begin to take care of other legal issues.
- ☐ Learn about homeless veterans services.
- ☐ Learn about resources for women veterans.
- ☐ If you are not currently receiving benefits, find out if you can or should be.
- ☐ If you are receiving benefits, notify the VA when you go to prison to avoid an overpayment.
- ☐ Contact a veteran service representative to represent you and help you file a claim.
- ☐ Apply for apportionment so that some of the money withheld may be given to eligible family members.

Resource Addresses/Sites

US Dept of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) www.va.gov/

Veterans Health Administration – VISN 1 www.connecticut.va.gov

VA Connecticut Healthcare System <http://vaww.visn1.med.va.gov/>

Connecticut Dept of Veterans Affairs (DVA) www.ct.gov/ctva

The American Legion - Dept of CT www.ct.legion.org/

Disabled American Veterans – Dept of CT www.davct.org

Veterans of Foreign Wars – Post Locations <http://www.vfw.org>

Vietnam Veterans of America – <http://members.aol.com/vva120>

Connecticut Department of Labor Connecticut Works Centers
www.ctdol.state.ct.us/contactinfo/ctworks/directory.htm

Social Security Administration www.ssa.gov/

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans www.nchv.org

Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness www.cceh.org

Partnership for Strong Communities www.ctpartnershiphousing.com

Corporation for Supportive Housing www.csh.org