OUR MISSION
To promote self-sufficiency, stability, and financial security of homeless and low-income veterans through free and accessible legal services. Through restricted funding, we also provide legal services to homeless and at risk individuals in Cambridge.

BACKGROUND
In October 1991, a small group of students at Boston College Law School started Veterans Legal Services ("VLS") to provide legal assistance to residents at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans. Shortly thereafter, VLS incorporated and obtained 501(c)(3) status. Over the course of the past twenty-three years, VLS became Shelter Legal Services ("SLS") as it expanded to meet the legal needs of over 400 clients per year at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, Chelsea Soldiers’ Home, the Multi-Service Center for Homeless in Cambridge, and pre- and post-deployment briefings throughout the state.

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS
This past year has brought many exciting changes to our organization. While many of you have gotten to know us as Shelter Legal Services, we have renewed our focus on the organization’s original mission of serving veterans in need. We are therefore excited to announce that as of September 1, 2013 we will be ‘doing business as’ Veterans Legal Services!

Over the past year, we have also welcomed the newest member of the SLS team, Eve Elliott, Esq. who joined us as a staff attorney, together with Access to Justice Fellow, Rosemary Allen, Esq., and dozens of new volunteers. Despite these changes, our goals for the organization remain the same. We continue to strive to provide the most effective, accessible legal services to veterans and the homeless in need today, and to ensure that Shelter Legal Services is here to meet the needs of our clients in the years to come. In January 2013, SLS completed a professional strategic plan to ensure we continue to meet those goals, but we cannot do it without your essential, sustaining support.

VLS was started because other organizations were not meeting the legal needs of our servicemembers and veterans. Twenty-three years later, we are still the primary provider of legal services to veterans in the Greater Boston Area. We cannot do it alone. **Your support enables us to stand up for veterans dealing with financial, family, and disability issues which too often result from the stresses of military service. Will you make sure they are accounted for?** Please join us in fulfilling our mission by visiting veteranslegalservices.org and supporting VLS today.

Sarah E. Roxburgh, Esq. & Anna Schleelein Richardson, Esq.
Co-Executive Directors
One of the most important things we learn in the Marine Corps is to never leave someone behind. Here at home, it is equally important that we follow through on that shared responsibility to our nation’s veterans; in particular, those who are most in need. And we must continue until everyone is accounted for.

Serving as the President of Shelter Legal Services is one of the ways that I have been able to follow through on that responsibility. Through our on-site clinics located at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, Cambridge Multi-Service Center, and the Chelsea Soldiers’ Home, Shelter Legal Services and its volunteers have provided free legal services valued at over $1 million to nearly five hundred clients who would otherwise not have received services in 2013.

Our organization has made great strides this past year. We have taken on higher impact cases, added key members to our team, and we were recently chosen by Root Cause as one of its five 2014 Social Innovators! We are also rebranding the organization, now ‘doing business as’ Veterans Legal Services, to better align with our mission of helping veterans in need, and our services are having a major lasting impact in our clients’ lives. But while overall rates of veterans’ homelessness have decreased since 2010, the number of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and have since become homeless, has more than doubled. More women veterans, younger veterans, and families need help now, and legal services are three of their top ten unmet needs. Shelter Legal Services is committed to serving them. Will you help us fulfill that commitment?

Imagine being a young man or woman unable to return to work because of injuries from combat, a parent receiving an eviction notice just before the holidays, or not being able to access critical benefits and services when you need them the most. These are the legal issues our clients face every day as they struggle to survive and support their families. With your help, Shelter Legal Services can make sure these veterans have a voice, an advocate in the courtroom, someone to make sure their sacrifice is not forgotten and they are accounted for in their community. We cannot do it without your support. For every veteran we are able to help, we must turn away many more due to a lack of resources. It doesn’t have to be that way. Visit our new website, www.veteranslegalservices.org, to support our mission and learn more today.

Timothy McLaughlin, Esq.
President
Since 1991, SLS has provided legal services to thousands of Massachusetts veterans at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, the Chelsea Soldiers’ Home, and Yellow Ribbon Events for deploying and returning servicemembers and their families.

Every year SLS helps hundreds of homeless and low-income veterans, individuals, and families resolve legal issues that pose barriers to their transition from poverty or homelessness to stability and self-sufficiency. SLS clients are low income, and most are living in shelters when they receive SLS services. Recent results achieved by our staff, volunteer Law Student Advocates, and pro bono attorneys, include:

- Secured the return of a six-year-old child who had been kidnapped by the non-custodial parent and kept out of state without permission from the custodial parent or the Probate and Family Court.

- Successfully overturned a court judgment prohibiting a veteran from participating in Jewish War Veterans of America, other veterans groups, parades, non-profit organizations, and social activities at his temple.

- Assisted a young homeless man with sealing a portion of his criminal record. After his mother passed away, he became involved in crime and drugs. He has since completed treatment programs and has become a substance abuse peer counselor helping others. He is in school full-time, has secured housing, and has recently found a job.

- Represented a disabled veteran in appealing his termination from the Shelter Plus Care housing program. His housing benefits had been previously terminated based on improper, ex parte communications with the hearing officer assigned to hear his case.

- Dismissed several consumer debt collection actions against veterans who were being harassed by debt collectors after becoming disabled.

- Assisted two veterans with modifying their child support and alimony payments after they became disabled. Secured credit for thousands of dollars in Social Security Disability Insurance dependency benefits received by both of their former spouses towards these obligations, thereby resulting in both veterans securing housing and transitioning out of homelessness.

- Secured or reinstated state or federal veterans benefits for six veterans.

“\nThe professionalism, time spent, and attention to detail made me feel at times as if I was their only client. I can't say this enough; I am extremely grateful for what they have done and continue to do.\”

Michael, SLS Client, USMC 1968-1971
VETERANS LEGAL CLINICS

Our veterans legal clinics began 23 years ago when a group of law students observed that the residents of the New England Center for Homeless Veterans were not being served by other legal services programs. Today, drawing on the organization’s years of experience, SLS is still the primary legal services organization serving Greater Boston’s servicemembers and veterans in need. We believe that no man or woman who has served our country should be homeless or at risk of homelessness because of a lack of legal representation.

Each year, through our on-site legal clinics, SLS staff and volunteers assist hundreds of veterans with resolving legal issues that pose barriers to self-sufficiency and the transition from homelessness. SLS staff, with the help of our Law Student Advocates, provide on-site services to veterans at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, the Chelsea Soldiers’ Home, Massachusetts Veterans Stand Down, and various Yellow Ribbon events for deploying and returning National Guard Members. SLS volunteer attorneys provide legal advice and assistance in collaboration with the staff at our host sites, together with other supportive services providers such as the Department of Veterans Services Statewide Advocacy for Veterans Empowerment (S.A.V.E.) outreach team.

SLS volunteer Law Student Advocates assist our attorneys by interviewing clients, performing legal research, screening clients for financial and geographic eligibility, and assisting in our office. Each semester over 30 law students devote a minimum of five hours per week assisting SLS in serving our clients. Many of our volunteer law students and attorneys have a unique interest in serving veterans because of their own, or a family member’s military service.

At Massachusetts Veterans Stand Down, SLS staff and volunteer attorneys provided 122 homeless and at-risk veterans with legal information, advice, and referrals to appropriate agencies in a single weekend.

“Shelter Legal Services has assisted thousands of veterans facing the challenge of homelessness. Because of the services they provide at the Center, homeless veterans are able to resolve the legal issues that pose a barrier to independent living.”

Mr. Andrew McCawley, CEO 
The New England Center for Homeless Veterans

SLS staff, volunteer attorneys, and law students serve veterans at 2013 Massachusetts Veterans Stand Down
Another key part of our work is educating others on how to meet the unique legal needs of veterans and their families. SLS staff provide training and materials to volunteer attorneys and law students, serve as mentors to those assisting veterans, and provide information and feedback to community members on the needs of our clients.

Attorney Anna Schleelein Richardson continues to be actively involved as Co-Chair of the Boston Bar Association’s Delivery of Legal Services Section Committee on Legal Services for Military Personnel, Veterans, and their Families. Attorney Richardson has also participated as faculty on various continuing legal education courses, bar association trainings, and other trainings to educate attorneys regarding the unique legal issues faced by veterans.

COMMUNITY LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES PROJECT

The Community Legal Assistance Services Project (“CLASP”) is another SLS initiative devoted to serving the homeless and removing legal barriers to stable housing. Funded by a generous grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development through the City of Cambridge, SLS attorneys and volunteer Law Student Advocates provide on-site legal services to homeless individuals at the Cambridge Multi-Service Center.

SLS collaborates with HomeStart, Heading Home, and area homeless shelters to identify individuals in need of legal services. SLS staff and volunteer Law Student Advocates partner with shelter and service center staff to provide comprehensive services and improve case outcomes.

SUPPORT FOR TENANTS AT RISK

The Support for Tenants At Risk (“STAR”) program began in July 2013 as a collaboration between the Cambridge Multi-Service Center, Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, Elliot Community Human Services, HomeStart, and SLS. Through STAR, these community partners identify clients facing eviction whose tenancies can be preserved through legal and other assistance. SLS attorneys represent these clients in the Cambridge District Court, while securing financial and supportive services to allow these individuals and families to remain in their homes.
The important work of Shelter Legal Services would not be possible without the generous financial support of the Boston Bar Foundation, the Cambridge Community Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Massachusetts Bar Foundation, and all of our private and corporate sponsors.

We are also incredibly grateful to all who give online, at fundraising events, or with the gift of their time and professional services to help sustain the organization. With your help, we look forward to continuing to change lives in 2013-2014.

Shelter Legal Services is a small organization that generates big results by using creativity and ingenuity to minimize operating costs. SLS’s model of on-site services allows us to develop synergies with our host sites that reduce costs and improve case outcomes.

Generous donations of office space and professional services allow us to devote nearly 80% of our funding to direct client services, legal advice, and representation.

By utilizing the services of nearly one hundred volunteer law students and attorneys each year, SLS is able to serve hundreds of clients at a very low cost per case. The end result is more value per dollar for each of our funders, public and private, together with rewarding pro bono opportunities for those wishing to give back to the community.
We thank the following sponsors and donors for their support.

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Special thanks to John and Katie Pollock who, in lieu of gifts, asked their wedding guests donate to support project CLASP. Congratulations John & Katie!

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Staff Attorney, March 2013 - present

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Special thanks to our 2013 Summer Interns who devoted their entire summer to volunteering with SLS full-time, assisting with all aspects of client representation and organizational operations.

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