

Massachusetts Department of Revenue
Child Support Enforcement Division
(DOR)

Collaboration with

The U.S. Department of Veterans
Affairs and The American Bar
Association through Shelter Legal
Services and The Volunteer Lawyers
Project

Goal of the Collaboration

- Assist homeless veterans with their child support issues.
- The program was designed as part of President Obama and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki's comprehensive five-year plan to end homelessness among Veterans

Project Planning

- DOR staff, VA clinical staff, and ABA participants from Shelter Legal Services and the Volunteer Lawyers Project met to discuss the mission.
- The VA staff agreed to identify veterans who were in need of legal assistance with their child support to participate in the project.
 - They obtain written authorization from the veteran to discuss and disclose case information to the VA clinician assigned to work with the veteran.
 - Refer the veteran to Shelter Legal Services lawyers to review their cases.

Project Planning

- Shelter Legal Services (SLS)
 - Recruit and train volunteer lawyers to assist veterans with their child support cases.
 - Assist veterans with obtaining modifications as appropriate.
 - Refer other cases to Volunteer Lawyers Project when additional legal work is needed.
 - Refer cases to DOR when a modification is not appropriate but the case may be appropriate for other assistance, e.g., arrears management or settlement

Project Planning

- VA staff manually track referrals to SLS.
- Outcome measurements are based on the number of modifications filed, heard by the court, arrears adjustments, negotiated settlements, and other issues resolved through this project, e.g., license suspensions resolved, bank levies released.

Roadblocks

- There is a natural “adversarial” relationship between the legal community who are working to assist the veteran and the IV-D agency.
 - IV-D agency is charged with collecting court ordered child support.
 - ABA and the VA are advocating on behalf of the veteran, who in most cases, owes child support.
 - This collaboration is intended to break down barriers between these entities in order to assist the veteran.

Roadblocks

- Shelter Legal Services and the Volunteer Lawyers Project both have a cap on the income level of an individual they are able to assist.
- Homeless veterans are often difficult to locate.
- Some of the veterans live outside the ABA service area.
- Many homeless or at-risk veterans are fearful of the legal process; need to build trust with the program participants.
- The collaboration participants are also working on several other projects so resource availability (people, time, and money) are an issue.

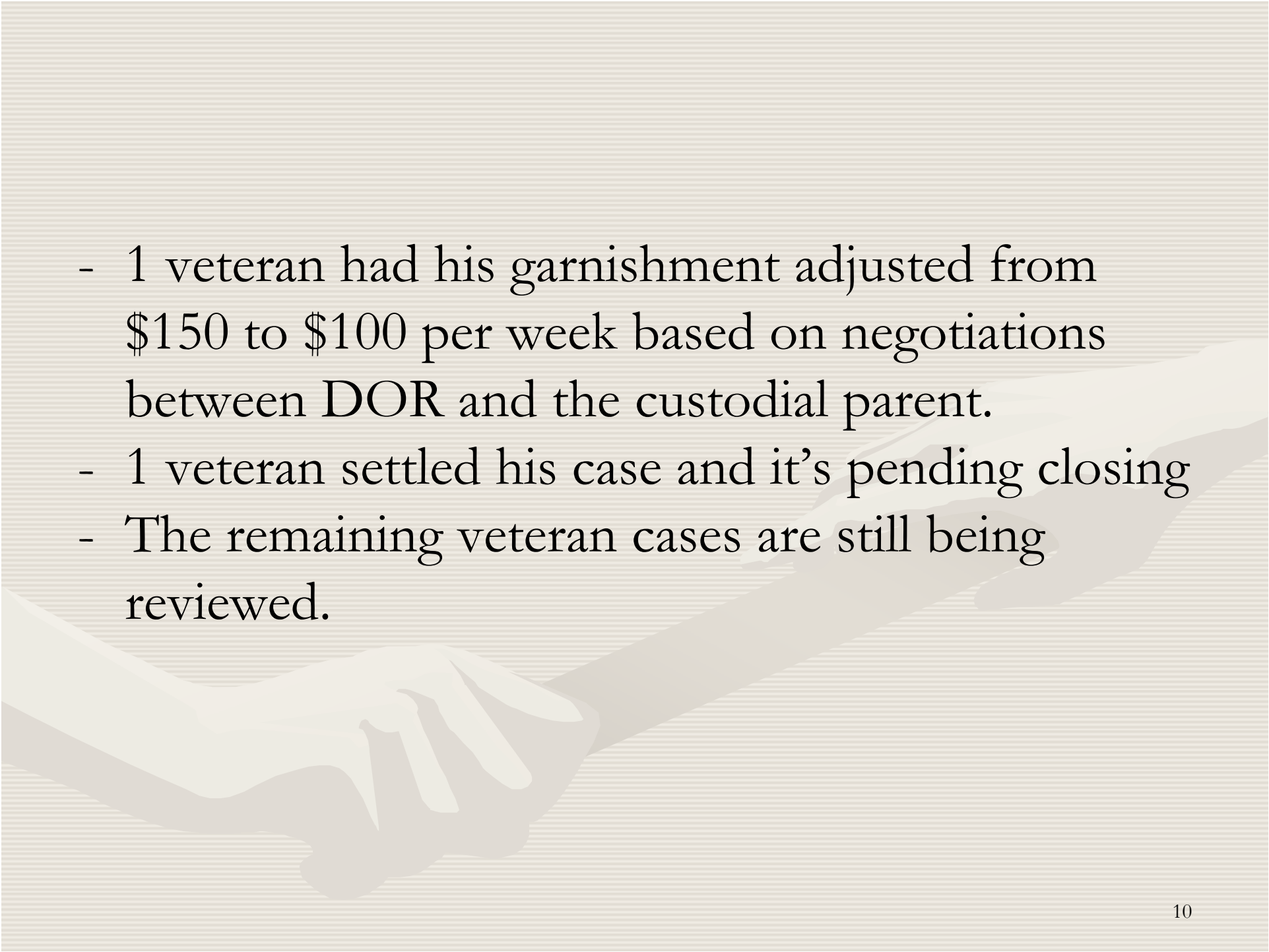
Project Status

- The workgroup has met and had conference calls to discuss the process and the roadblocks.
- The ABA participants have held training and recruiting sessions to get volunteer lawyers to work on this project.
- Workgroup participants are planning a clinic to assist this population at one of the MA VA facilities.

Project Status

There have been close to 70 veterans referred to SLS for a case review:

- 23 cases have been referred to the Volunteer Lawyers Project for additional legal assistance.
- 13 veterans are having modifications worked on by SLS.
- 20 veterans have either not responded to follow-up calls or do not have a case housed in Massachusetts.
- 2 have already had their modifications heard in court.
- 1 veteran settle his case and it's pending closing

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- 1 veteran had his garnishment adjusted from \$150 to \$100 per week based on negotiations between DOR and the custodial parent.
 - 1 veteran settled his case and it's pending closing
 - The remaining veteran cases are still being reviewed.

Contact Information

Lisa Perfetuo-Miller

millerli@MA.DOR.STATE.US

