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Lopez, Donna

From: Annie Fowler [afowler@eldercare.org]
Sent: Friday, May 02, 2014 3:39 PM
To: Lopez, Donna
Cc: City Council
Subject: CASLS Letter of Support
Attachments: Letter of Support for CASLS 5.14.pdf

Hello,
We are submitting a letter of support for Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services to maintain their satellite office in Cambridge. We'd like to ask that the letter be entered into the official record of the City Council. Letter is attached.

Thank You,
Annie Fowler

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Annie Fowler, LICSW
Director of Clinical Services

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May 2, 2014

To Whom it May Concern:

We are writing this letter to ask for continued funding of Cambridge Somerville Legal Services, which provides vital support to some of our most vulnerable citizens. Through our Homecare and Adult Protective Service Programs, we have worked with CASLS on many occasions- often they have been the only thing standing between an elderly, disabled resident and homelessness.

Here are some common stories of SCES clients that CASLS has helped:

- People at risk of eviction due to actions of family members, who often have mental health or substance use conditions
- People who are immigrants, don't speak English and have a disability, with no means to meet their basic needs
- Those at risk of eviction due to untreated mental health conditions- symptoms such as delusions or paranoia, which led to alleged lease violations
- Those at risk of eviction because they fell behind in their rent or had trouble with their re-certification process due to symptoms of dementia or trouble with money management.

There are common threads to these stories. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, approximately half of people experiencing homelessness suffer from mental health conditions. There are many (though not enough) programs focused on housing search, however there are very few that provide assistance with maintaining housing. This service is essential- not just because stable housing is integral in maintaining mental health recovery- but because the process of eviction and housing search and advocacy is a tremendous drain on financial and human resources.

This summer, Cambridge will be joining other housing authorities in efforts to create smoke-free housing. While this policy has many positive benefits, it will undoubtedly also pose difficulties for tenants with mental illness who self-soothe with cigarettes and/or have cognitive impairments impacting their judgment and ability to understand the implications of their actions. It is essential that legal services are preserved to help ensure that people are protected throughout the roll-out of this policy.

What makes this CASLS so essential in Cambridge and Somerville is that they are integrated into these communities and know all of the players. When an eviction case comes in for example, they know who to call to ensure the long-term support that a resident might need to maintain their housing after the legal components are done. They understand the skills and limitations of other local social service agencies and offer support in terms of advice and trainings, and they can effectively tailor the trainings to the audience.

The scope of the work of Cambridge Somerville Legal Services is immeasurable. They don't just represent people can't afford an attorney, but they teach both clients and other agency professionals about the legal process and empower them to advocate on their own. They ease the burden on social service agencies that are stretched thin and help them run more efficiently. They push to move policies and practices forward.

Please support the continued work of Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services.

Sincerely,

Annie Fowler, LICSW	Cassie Cramer, LICSW	Mary Ann Dalton
Director of Clinical Services	Connect Social Worker	Assistant Executive Director