



Evaluating Common Law Marriage and SSA/VA Survivor Benefits

Summer Associate Project Exchange

Single or Multiple Opportunities

Single

Organization Name

Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE)

Background

Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) is researching how administrative practices at the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) create barriers to survivor benefits for common law spouses.

Scope of Work

Research how SSA and VA administrative practices create barriers to survivor benefits that disproportionately harm communities of color.

Timing

End of summer deadline.

Jurisdiction

Federal and DC

Contact Information

Please contact Paul Lee (plee@step toe.com) and Natallya Velev (natallya.velev@ropesgray.com) if you'd like to be assigned to this project.

Description

Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) is researching how administrative practices at the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) create barriers to survivor benefits for common law spouses. Many agency forms do not clearly indicate that common law marriages may be recognized, leading spouses not to identify as married; agencies then use these prior statements as evidence against the existence of a common law marriage when benefits are later sought. This dynamic disproportionately harms Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other communities of color, particularly those who are older and low-income. The project will analyze SSA and VA case data to identify trends in benefit denials where marital status is at issue and examine correlations between race, income, age, and rates of common law marriage. The desired work product is a memo proposing reforms and legal and policy advocacy strategies at both the D.C. and national levels.

Subtasks (0)

Reminders(0)