

## Attend LACBA's Third Armed Forces Ball and Help a Vet

**VETERANS DAY IS ALMOST HERE AGAIN.** I always appreciate it when people say, “Thank you for your service,” because I know it is meant in a good spirit. But there are many veterans in Los Angeles who need more than “thank you”—they need legal help.

Los Angeles is home to one of the largest populations of homeless and at-risk veterans in the country. They are caught in a downward spiral, often starting with psychological issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, for which they sometimes self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. Some start off with a less-than-honorable discharge, which can reduce their benefits and opportunities. Inevitably, they wind up with legal problems: driving under the influence and traffic offenses; warrants and misdemeanors; and family law issues. These problems frequently result in homelessness and joblessness. Without legal assistance, it is almost impossible to overcome these obstacles.

### Veterans Legal Services Project

The LACBA Veterans Legal Services Project is helping. The project was created in 2014, and its mission is to help veterans overcome legal obstacles to employment and self-sufficiency. As one of the four key initiatives of LACBA's Counsel for Justice, the project is overseen by the LACBA Armed Forces Committee, which had been tasked by former LACBA President Alan Steinbrecher to determine what could be done to assist the many veterans in need of legal services. Project Director Andrew Culberson and Managing Project Attorney Tara Hunter, together with committee Vice Chair Michael Owens and numerous volunteers from the legal community, have achieved superb results for hundreds of veterans.

The project holds regular legal clinics for veterans at the iconic Patriotic Hall in downtown Los Angeles, focusing on three key areas: clearing tickets and warrants, expunging misdemeanors, and reinstating driver's licenses. While these legal matters may sound minor, they can prevent a veteran from passing a background check for employment or driving to work.

### Expanded Services

The project has continued to expand, partnering with the Levitt & Quinn Family Law Center in 2016 to offer family law clinics for veterans. That same year the project began a partnership with the Proskauer law firm to offer pro bono estate planning services. In 2017, the project teamed up with Wells Fargo Bank to hold financial literacy workshops. In 2018, the project made two significant additions: 1) pro bono placements for veterans seeking discharge upgrades and 2) on-site consultations held in veterans' centers in West Los Angeles and San Pedro, greatly increasing access to services for veterans in those areas. For 2019, the project will add more off-site locations and implement a new service for small business development under the leadership of Bill Markley, a retired Navy officer and former general counsel.

The project works because of the tremendous support from the legal community, which provides the legal staff for all the clinics. Participating firms include Gibson Dunn, Greenberg Traurig, Foley & Mansfield, Proskauer, Sheppard Mullin, Morgan Lewis, and Arnold & Porter, and the corporate law departments of such leading companies as Activision Blizzard, A&E, Farmers Insurance, and AECOM.

### Urgent Need

The data from the clinics shows how urgent the need is: Each veteran served has, on average, four outstanding tickets or convictions on their record; 75 percent have incomes below the federal poverty line; 39 percent are homeless and another 11 percent report they are at risk of homelessness; and 42 percent are disabled as a result of their military service.

The need is great, but thanks to the staff and volunteers, the results are great, too. The project has generated thousands of hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars in free legal services, which help hundreds of veterans. More than 80 percent of the project's clients successfully clear legal barriers to employment, and the project links former clients to community partners specializing in job placement.

Running legal clinics also takes money. Wells Fargo Bank has been a generous supporter of the project throughout the years and has enabled steady growth in the services provided. In addition, Ronald Bae, a former Navy JAG officer now at Aequitas Legal Group, was instrumental in obtaining a substantial cy pres award for the project.

### Veterans Ball

The costs are ongoing, and the project is seeking to raise additional funds through the Armed Forces Ball. LACBA's Armed Forces Committee will host its Third Armed Forces Ball on March 2, 2019, at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. This is a unique “full dress uniform” and black-tie event that will feature a color guard and a live band, as well as compelling speakers and deserving honorees who have done so much to help our veterans. Each firm that purchases a table will be asked to host a veteran and guest. This means that deserving veterans will literally have a “seat at the table.”

With your help, by the time Veterans Day comes around again in 2019, there will be fewer veterans on the street and more resources to keep veterans in their own residences with the employment, support, and dignity they deserve. ■

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