

JUSTICE FOR THOSE WHO SERVED: JOIN THE TAKE ONE CAMPAIGN

A new Texas Access to Justice Commission program encourages lawyers to assist veterans with their legal needs.

WRITTEN BY TERRY TOTENHAM AND ALFRED VALENZUELA



On March 4, 1865, only 41 days before his assassination, President Abraham Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural Address. His closing paragraph contained these immortal words: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive ... to care for him who has borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan”

Texas currently has one of the highest populations of veterans in the nation, and a distressing number of Texas veterans are living in poverty or without homes.

Heeding Lincoln’s immortal words and building on the important work started by the Houston Bar Association, which offered weekly legal clinics at the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Houston, the State Bar of Texas implemented Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans (TLTV) in 2010 to provide pro bono civil legal assistance to veterans and their families who otherwise could not afford legal services. TLTV is a collaborative effort with not only local bar associations, but also with legal aid organizations, law schools, and veteran service providers to host legal advice clinics throughout the state. Notwithstanding the resounding success of TLTV and its clinics (serving more than 40,000 veterans thus far), more needs to be done.

On TLTV’s 15th anniversary, the Texas Access to Justice Commission’s Veterans Committee is initiating the Take One campaign, which encourages lawyers to take one veteran’s case per year in their legal specialty. In doing so, we will develop a statewide referral list to which legal aid providers can refer a veteran’s case on an as-needed

basis. Adding more boots on the ground will ensure that we continue to provide needed civil legal services to those who have served but cannot afford those services.

Many different issues plague veterans and require specialized assistance. For example, real estate questions, employment disputes, small business claims, family law matters, general litigation disputes, bankruptcy questions, estate planning advice, wills and probate assistance, administrative law matters, landlord-tenant disputes, and disability appeals, to name a few.

Tragically, many of our veterans are homeless. Through a partnership with the Tunnel to Towers Foundation, Lone Star Legal Aid and Norton Rose Fulbright have conducted a veteran’s legal clinic at the Houston Veterans Village that houses 131 units for homeless veterans. Additionally, some law schools have focused on the homeless veteran, aiding where military records are normally nonexistent or difficult to find.

At St. Mary’s University School of Law, the Warrior Defense Project has gone one step further. This nationally recognized research center, dedicated to the study of military legal and policy issues, provides free legal services to service members wrongfully accused of misconduct.

Past cases have seen success in defending soldiers who have been wrongfully charged with murder for shooting an enemy combatant in Afghanistan or with violating rules of engagement by ordering troops to fire against the enemy. Law students conduct research and take part in the legal representation of selected military cases. They help in writing amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court, providing many law review articles on military issues.

The TLTV experience clearly proves that a lawyer or law student can make a significant difference in a veteran's life.

- Because of a Texas lawyer, a veteran receives the benefits she deserves.
- Because of a Texas lawyer, a soldier's widow can keep her home.
- Because of a Texas lawyer, a homeless veteran has a permanent address.
- Because of a Texas lawyer, a returning soldier receives benefits and medical assistance for PTSD.
- Because of a Texas lawyer, a veteran's wrongfully assigned general discharge is upgraded to an honorable discharge.
- Because of Texas lawyers, veterans have someone fighting on their behalf.

We hope you will support our veterans and join the Take One campaign. In doing so, you will: increase access to the justice system; grow the number of veterans who receive free legal aid; create impactful change in a person's life; and assist pro bono providers to be more effective and efficient. **TBJ**

Please sign up with the below QR Code or the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BQPJ2W3>.



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