



Get Out of Your Comfort Zone: **HELP A VETERAN**

“Taking on a challenge is a lot like riding a horse, isn't it? If you're comfortable while you're doing it, you're probably doing it wrong.” —Ted Lasso

Each year on November 11, we honor the men and women who have served our country on Veterans Day. They have sacrificed their all for us—the least we can do as Texas lawyers is to help Texas veterans with a few hours of our time.

Numbering approximately 1.5 million, Texas has one of the nation's highest populations of veterans.¹ Sadly, many are homeless or living in poverty and lacking the resources to hire legal help when they need it. Many veterans who sacrificed for us are now living on the streets without basic necessities or living check to check worried they will lose what basic necessities they have.

To help address this issue, in 2010, the State Bar of Texas and then-President Terry Tottenham founded Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans to provide pro bono civil legal assistance to brave veterans and their families who otherwise cannot afford legal services. TLTV is modeled after a program started by the Houston Bar Association in 2008. The program provides almost all the resources needed to enable local bar associations and legal aid organizations to provide veterans the legal assistance they need—the only exception being volunteers. These volunteers help veterans with issues ranging from family law, wills and probate, consumer law, tax law, property issues, landlord/tenant, and disability benefits, among other civil issues.

So far, more than 34,000 veterans have been served by almost 12,000 volunteer attorneys, paralegals, and law students through these clinics. In the last bar year (June 2022 to May 2023), nearly 2,000 veterans received limited-scope or full-scale legal representation for their issues. Currently, more than 20 bar associations and other organizations are participating statewide.

On November 4, 2023, the Texas Access to Justice Commission Veterans Committee is partnering with legal service providers, bar associations, and other organizations throughout the state to provide free legal clinics for low-income Texas veterans.

Such clinics would not be possible without you. Attorneys across the state have dedicated thousands of hours to serve our veterans. Local universities have provided many clinics with prelaw and law students who can earn pro bono hours and are mentored through the program. Paralegal organizations provide many clinics with effective administrative volunteers as well.

Local bar associations are always in need of volunteers for their veterans' legal clinics. If you would like to volunteer at an existing clinic, please contact your local bar association directly or contact the State Bar's Local Bar Services Department at 512-427-1514 or localbars@texasbar.com. They can connect you with your nearest existing legal clinic.

Local bar associations interested in *starting* a clinic can also contact the Local Bar Services Department. They can provide you with resources like the “Clinic in a Box” or the “Veterans Clinic Marketing Tool Kit” to assist you in establishing a clinic and keeping it going.

Printed resources are also available. The Texas Young Lawyers Association has created two brochures: *Resources for Veterans Seeking Help* and *Resources for Lawyers Assisting Veterans*. You can order copies from the State Bar's Public Affairs Department by emailing pamphlets@texasbar.com.

Feel uncomfortable about starting a clinic or providing pro bono services in areas of the law unfamiliar to you? Good. Get uncomfortable and do some good. On Veterans Day, remember our Texas veterans and honor them with a few hours of your time. They gave their all for us. Let's give something back to them. Veterans with legal needs would be thankful for any level of service you can commit. For many, just getting to talk one-on-one with an attorney for 15 minutes can relieve a huge burden.

For more information on the State Bar of Texas' resources for veterans, go to texasbar.com/veterans.

CINDY TISDALE

President, 2023-2024
State Bar of Texas

NOTES

1. VA PACT Act Performance Dashboard, July 21, 2023, Issue Eleven, www.accessocare.va.gov/pdf/VA_PACTActDashboard_Issue11_072123_508.pdf.