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# Linda Klein: America's lawyers should serve those who have served

By Linda A. Klein, rpetersen@postbulletin.com Updated 4 hrs ago

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"Honor to the Soldier, and Sailor everywhere. ... Honor also to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field, and serves, as he best can." — Abraham Lincoln

Every Nov. 11, our nation pauses to honor its veterans. On this Veterans Day, the American Bar Association is calling on lawyers to do more — to serve those heroes who have put their lives on the line to protect us and all we hold dear.

Far too many veterans return from service to face credit or housing problems, benefits denial and family dissolution — all complications from putting their lives on hold. Some return suffering from physical disabilities or post-traumatic stress disorder. Sadly, many veterans suffer from serious mental illnesses and substance abuse stemming from their military service. Unfortunately, as a



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result, far too many end up unemployed, disconnected from family or even homeless or suicidal.

Veterans suffer from problems related to their service that many people overlook. Many of these issues can be solved only with the assistance of a lawyer. In fact, a Department of Veterans Affairs

study found that at least half of the top 10 problems leading to homelessness among veterans are legal problems.

Our country has nearly 40,000 homeless veterans. Veterans make up 20 percent of the male homeless population, while the fastest-growing homeless population in America is women veterans. And more than 13 percent of our nation's heroes live near or below the poverty line.

This year, we extended the ABA's National Pro Bono Celebration, conducted nationwide every year in October by bar associations and other legal services providers, to include Veterans Day. To assist our nation's heroes, we have requested that lawyers across the country donate a few hours of their time to assist a veteran with a legal issue.

A sampling of pro bono celebration events illustrate the breadth of legal needs our veterans have. On Nov. 5, Nevada Legal Services joined with the Nevada Attorney General's Office in Gardnerville to complete wills and other estate planning documents for veterans as well as active-duty military members. Because veterans' legal needs are so vast, the Legal Services staff also addressed questions related to such issues as family law, guardianship, benefits, housing and consumer matters.

The Minnesota Assistance Council For Veterans in Mankato held a Stand Down for Veterans 2016 on Nov. 9. Stand Downs are modeled after a concept used during the Vietnam War to provide a safe retreat for units returning from combat operations. MACV's Stand Down brought many useful resources, including medical, dental and legal, to one location and made them more accessible to all veterans who otherwise may not seek out services or take advantage of benefits due them.

The ABA also established a Veterans Legal Services Commission under the leadership of retired three-star Vice Admiral Nanette DeRenzi and Dwight Smith, a Tulsa, Okla., lawyer. The commission is harnessing the broad expertise of our nation's lawyers and our extensive national network to build a comprehensive online resource that will inform veterans of legal issues that could affect them and direct them to local resources and legal providers.

In addition, we are engaging law schools and bar associations to promote legal-services incubators to bring services to veterans while providing valuable training for new and underemployed lawyers. To help veterans resolve legal issues they may not know they have, we are encouraging legal checkups for veterans, their families and caregivers. And to solve clients' legal problems that may underlie medical issues, we are promoting medical-legal partnerships that pair doctors with lawyers.

We are also promoting Veterans Treatments Courts, which offer jail-diversion programs requiring regular court appearances along with mandatory attendance at treatment sessions and random drug testing. There are 306 courtrooms in 37 states, and research has found they are an effective way to help veterans get their lives back on track and address problems underlying their criminal



Linda Klein

behavior. They are so effective, we hope to see them expanded, possibly into such areas as debt collection and domestic relations.

Finally, to help increase the legal expertise in veterans' legal issues, we are working to create a certification of law specialty in this area.

Lawyers interested in helping veterans, as well as veterans looking for legal resources can find out more at [www.ambar.org/veterans](http://www.ambar.org/veterans).

Military veterans risked their lives to serve our country in defense of liberty, justice and the rule of law. This speaks to the core of the legal profession. It is only appropriate that we as lawyers recognize their sacrifices and not just honor them but also serve them in meaningful ways.

**Linda A. Klein is president of the American Bar Association.**

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**DO YOU HAVE DIZZINESS WITH MIGRAINES?**

> Mayo Clinic is seeking people with vestibular migraines to participate in a research study. Vestibular migraines are a type of migraine headache that causes attacks of vertigo or dizziness. The purpose of this study is to learn more about vestibular migraine symptoms. We also want to learn about the effects, good and bad, of a common migraine drug when it is used by people with vestibular migraine.

> **YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IF:**

- You are between 18 and 65 years old
- You have vestibular migraine
- You are able to keep a vestibular symptom diary

For more information, please contact  
Deanna at (507) 255-2972 or  
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