



INFORMATION FOR CLIENTS OF TEXAS ATTORNEYS

The information included on this page is for educational and informational purposes only. Please consult an attorney regarding specific legal questions.

Protecting the Rights of Veterans

Veterans face the same issues that all Texans face: going to school, finding a job, obtaining a loan, and getting health care. Veterans also deal with issues unique to those who have served our country in uniform.

An attorney can assist veterans with various legal matters, including disputes related to housing, as well as applications for benefits related to public health, family members, and education. Attorneys can also assist on an appeal of benefits, correcting military records, helping obtain a disability rating, and obtaining much-needed disability benefits. Veterans may qualify for pro bono services, if they meet certain eligibility criteria.

The first step veterans should take in receiving legal help is educating themselves about their rights. The effort required to obtain documentary evidence that is necessary to succeed on a claim is a detailed process that can be overwhelming. An attorney or a non-profit agency focused on veterans' rights can guide claimants through the process. The laws have changed over the past few years, and Congress passed legislation to make it easier for attorneys to assist veterans. Prior restrictions against having representation no longer exist, so taking the time to talk with a lawyer may make all the difference between obtaining much-needed benefits and getting denied again.

Making a Case

An advocate who can dedicate the time needed to make a claim successful can be invaluable. It is common to hear a pro se veteran (one who represents him or herself) say that he or she just doesn't have the time "to put up a fight." Having an advocate on his or her side can help alleviate this problem and help the veteran put his or her best foot forward.



An attorney will have access to countless resources veterans may otherwise be unfamiliar with. An attorney can help obtain evidence that is critical to a claim and can be creative in maneuvering through obstacles. Counsel can help find the support a veteran needs to prove a case, whether through documentary evidence or witness testimony. An advocate can also help look at a case or claim more objectively, to determine where the strengths (and weaknesses) lie and assist in emphasizing those strengths.

How To Find An Attorney

A number of agencies can assist veterans in finding the representation needed to secure benefits that have been denied, as well as represent them in other legal issues.

If a veteran is unsure whether he or she qualifies for specific services, it is important that he or she applies for assistance.

If the first agency is unable to assist the veteran, it may be able to direct him or her to another resource. Help is out there, but veterans have to take the important first step in reaching out for assistance.

Free Texas Veterans' Legal Clinics

If you or a veteran you know needs legal advice for basic civil legal services, check for a veterans' legal clinic in your area. Civil practice areas covered in veterans' legal clinics include bankruptcy, child support, consumer/contracts, divorce or custody/guardianship, probate, landlord/tenant, wills/estate planning, employment, housing, and tax. Assistance in other areas may also be available.

Please note that most clinics require an appointment to attend. Contact the individual clinics for more information or to sign up. For a list of veterans' legal clinics around the state, visit www.texasbar.com/veterans.



Income guidelines may apply for free legal representation. Income guidelines generally use a percentage of the federal poverty income amount. Contact each veterans' legal clinic for its policy.

Veterans who do not qualify for free legal services can contact the Lawyer Referral Information Service at (800) 252-9690. Through the Lawyer Referral Information Service, a person may have a 30-minute consultation with an attorney for \$20. At the end of the consultation, the attorney and individual may discuss possible representation and price structure.

The Lawyer Referral Information Service is not a pro bono or reduced-fee program. For more information, visit www.texasbar.com/LRIS.

Other Resources

There are a number of federal, state, and local organizations that provide various resources to veterans seeking help. Here are just a few of the many state programs and services available to Texas veterans.

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) serves veterans, dependents, and survivors in all matters relating to veteran employment and disability benefits and rights. The designated state agency to represent the state and its veterans before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the agency serves veterans with VA claims from 32 offices located in 29 cities throughout the state. To contact the TVC, call (800) 252-VETS or visit www.texas-veterans.com.

The Texas Workforce Commission offers the Texas Veterans Leadership Program, a resource and referral network that connects returning veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan with the resources and tools they need to seek employment and educational opportunities. An all-veterans team, the Veterans Resource and Referral Specialists, works to find ancillary services in local communities and seek out veterans in need of services. For more information, visit www.twc.state.tx.us/tvlp/tvlp.html.

Veterans can access home loan programs through the VA (www.valoans.com), as well as through the Texas Veterans Land Board, which administers three veterans loan programs. The Veterans Housing Assistance Purchase Program provides purchase money financing up to \$325,000 for the purchase of a qualified primary home to qualified Texas veterans. Under the Veterans Home Improvement Program, eligible Texas veterans may be loaned up to

\$25,000 for up to 20 years on a fixed-rate note to enable them to make substantial alterations or repairs to existing property. The Land Loan Program provides financing up to \$80,000 for land within Texas that contains at least one acre, has legal access to a public road, and has not been owned by the veteran or his or her spouse within the past three years. To learn more, visit www.glo.state.tx.us/vlb. ❖



This article was excerpted from *Resources for Veterans Seeking Help*, prepared as a public service by the Texas Young Lawyers Association and distributed by the State Bar of Texas. To obtain a copy of the booklet, contact Public Information Department, State Bar of Texas, P.O. Box 12487, Austin 78711-2487; (800) 204-2222, Ext. 1800; or visit www.tyla.org or www.texasbar.com/veterans.

STATE BAR of TEXAS MINORITY DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS SOUGHT

Dec. 15 is the deadline to submit nominations for the available position for minority director on the State Bar Board of Directors for a three-year term beginning June 2011. Nominations must include a nomination letter from a third party; a resume which includes bar participation, civic and political activities, ethnicity, gender, and place of residence; and letters of recommendation (typically three to five). Self-nominations will not be accepted.

Submit the complete nomination to:

Yvette Ostolaza, Chair
Ad Hoc Committee to Select Minority Directors
c/o State Bar of Texas
1414 Colorado St., Ste. 300
Austin, TX 78701-1627

For more information, contact Candiss Held at cheld@texasbar.com.

www.TexasBar.com