



# 2017 LEGISLATIVE SESSION AG REQUEST LEGISLATION

## INCREASING ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES FOR CURRENT & FORMER MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

Washington should help promote and facilitate access to civil legal services for Washington’s current and former military service members.

### PROBLEM

The landscape of cost effective legal services available to Washington’s current and former military service members is fragmented and limited. There is no “one-stop shop” for this population to access the resources available to protect their legal rights.

### BACKGROUND

The men and women who serve our country in the Armed Forces have unique legal needs arising from overseas deployments, sudden moves, military service obligations, separation of family members, and challenges in securing military benefits, including health care. Federal and state law offer special protections to current and former military service members and, if they meet qualifications, they may access services from military legal assistance offices and civil legal aid offices. However, such assistance is often limited in scope and availability. For example, special military legal assistance services may not be offered to reservists or members of the National Guard.

Compounding the problem, the limited civil legal aid services and legal pro bono services offered are generally targeted to the general population, so current and former military service members must compete for access. There is presently no central clearinghouse where this valued segment of our population can go to learn about the resources available to them to protect their legal rights.

### LEGISLATION (SB 5021 - HB 1055)

Patterned after a successful model in Nevada, this legislation establishes an Office of Military and Veteran Legal Assistance within the Attorney General’s Office. The Office will promote and facilitate civil legal assistance programs, pro bono services, and self-help services for military services members, veterans, and their family members domiciled or stationed in Washington.

The legislation authorizes the Attorney General’s Office to:

- Recruit and train volunteer attorneys and coordinate service programs;
- Conduct intake and connect those in need to available resources; and
- Apply for and receive grants or other contributions to help support the office.

If the Attorney General’s Office can enlist just 1% of the state’s nearly 35,000 lawyers to each perform 8 hours of new pro bono service annually, it would equate to more than \$500,000 in free legal services to benefit Washington’s veterans and military families. The Nevada Office of Military Legal Assistance reported addressing 200+ legal matters within its first year. The legislation establishes a committee to provide advice and assistance regarding program design, operation, volunteer recruitment, and service delivery.



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