

INCREASING ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES BY CURRENT & FORMER MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS



Office of the
Attorney General

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OBJECTIVE

To promote and facilitate access to civil legal services by Washington's current and former military service members.

PROBLEM

Without a focused and coordinated effort, the landscape of cost effective legal services available to serve Washington's current and former military service members is fragmented and limited, and there is no "one-stop shop" for current and former service members to turn to learn about the resources available to them to protect their legal rights.

BACKGROUND

The men and women who serve our country in the Armed Forces can have unique legal needs and problems arising from overseas deployments, sudden moves, military service obligations, separation of key family members, and challenges in securing military benefits and health care. At both the federal and state level, certain existing law offers special legal protections to current and former military service members,¹ and, if they meet the qualifications, they may be able to access services from military legal assistance offices and or civil legal aid offices that provide help in seeking redress for these and their other legal rights. However, such assistance for current and former military members can be frequently limited in scope and availability. For example, special military legal assistance services may not be offered to reservists or members of the National Guard, while civil legal aid services are generally targeted to the population at large.

Compounding the problem is that the limited civil legal aid services and legal pro bono services offered are generally targeted to the population at large, so that current and former military service members must compete for access. Additionally, 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 (HB 2496 / SB 6300)

Modeled after a similar effort in Nevada and others under consideration in Illinois and Indiana, this legislation establishes an Office of Military and Veteran Legal Assistance within the Office of the Attorney General to promote and facilitate civil legal assistance programs, pro bono services, and self-help services for military service members, veterans, and their family members domiciled or stationed in Washington state.

To accomplish this, the legislation authorizes the Attorney General's Office to:

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

The legislation also establishes an advisory committee to provide advice and assistance regarding program design, operation, volunteer recruitment, and service delivery.

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SUPPORT

PRIME SPONSORS

- Sen. O'Ban
- Rep. Kilduff
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NEWS PUBLICATIONS

- Spokesman Review

1. 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update, October 2015, available at <http://www.google.com/>