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An All-Volunteer Force: Law Students and Pro Bono Lawyers Helping Veterans

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**AN ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE: LAW STUDENTS AND PRO BONO LAWYERS
HELPING VETERANS**

Patricia E. Roberts*

I. INTRODUCTION.....	273
II. LEGAL NEEDS OF VETERANS	277
III. LAW SCHOOL CLINICS ON THE FRONT LINE FOR VETERANS	279
IV. THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION IS SENDING REINFORCEMENTS	289
V. CONCLUSION.....	293

I. INTRODUCTION

We are at a unique moment in time. There is more attention being paid to the issue of access to justice than at any time since the War on Poverty more than fifty years ago when the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Legal Services Corporation were created.¹ The gap between the highest income households and the poor has been growing wider since the 1970s, and is now as wide as it was in 1928.² This divide between the wealthy and those in poverty is the widest of any other developed democracy in the world.³ Poverty impacts the ability to obtain access to justice; without such

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1. See Lisa Foster, Dir., Office for Access to Justice, Remarks at the ABA's 2016 National Meeting of State Access to Justice Chairs (May 14, 2016), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/director-lisa-foster-office-access-justice-delivers-remarks-aba-s-2016-national-meeting>.

2. See Chad Stone, Danilo Trisi, Arloc Sherman & Emily Horton, *A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality* 13, CTR. ON BUDGET AND POL'Y PRIORITIES (July 29, 2016), <http://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/a-guide-to-statistics-on-historical-trends-in-income-inequality>.

3. Foster, *supra* note 1.

access, cycles of poverty cannot be broken, creating deprivation of basic human rights, and opportunity and encouragement for civil and criminal unrest among the most vulnerable among us. The obstacles that stand in the way of access to justice often exist for our veterans and service members as well. By utilizing the rapidly increasing pro bono services of law school clinics and pro bono attorneys dedicated to these populations, we can help ensure that those who take an oath to protect our nation are themselves protected when encountering the complexities of our judicial and administrative processes.

We are currently engaged in the longest war in United States history, with October 2016 marking the fifteenth year of U.S. military engagement in the Afghan War.⁴ Despite the longevity of our current conflicts, only about 1% of the adult U.S. population is serving our country in the armed forces, with fewer than 1.4 million men and women serving active-duty, and more than 800,000 in the reserves.⁵ It is a stark contrast from World War II, when 12 million Americans, or more than 15% of the adult population at the time, were in uniform,⁶ or Vietnam, when 2.7 million Americans served.⁷ Since the start of the Afghan War in 2001, approximately 2.7 million men and women have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan as part of our all-volunteer force.⁸ At least half have deployed more than once, with thousands deploying four or five times.⁹ In addition to the toll that extended conflict can place on our service members, our nation is engaged in a drawdown of armed forces, resulting in many of those volunteering to serve being involuntarily separated.¹⁰ Each year, around a quarter of a million service members exit the military and re-enter civilian life,¹¹ but they find less

4. Adam Taylor, *These Are America's 9 Longest Foreign Wars*, WASH. POST (May 29, 2014), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/05/29/these-are-americas-9-longest-foreign-wars/>.

5. Harvey M. Sapolsky, *What Americans Don't Understand About Their Own Military*, DEFENSE ONE (May 6, 2015), <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2015/05/what-americans-dont-understand-about-their-own-military/112042/>.

6. *Id.*

7. David Zucchino & David S. Cloud, *Special Report U.S. Military and Civilians Are Increasingly Divided*, L.A. TIMES (May 24, 2015), <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-warrior-main-20150524-story.html>.

8. Kristine A. Huskey, *Military Spouses and Kids Bear the Burden of Service*, TIMES (May 27, 2016), <http://time.com/4337925/memorial-day-family-benefits/>.

9. *Id.*

10. Press Release, Rand Corp., U.S. Military Drawdown Could Affect Gains in Service Member Diversity (Oct. 26, 2015), <http://www.rand.org/news/press/2015/10/26.html>.

11. *Why it Matters*, GOT YOUR 6, <https://gotyour6.org/about/why-it-matters/> (last visited Oct. 8, 2016).

awareness of their experiences among a society where so few actually serve in the armed forces, or have family members who currently serve.¹²

There is also a geographic disparity among those who serve, with nearly half of the 1.3 million active-duty service members in the U.S. concentrated in just five states—California, Virginia, Texas, North Carolina and Georgia.¹³ In addition, there are socioeconomic inequalities among those who are dying or being wounded in our current conflicts, with a disproportionately higher number coming from poorer areas of the country.¹⁴ The differences in median family income levels between high-casualty communities and low-casualty communities, when adjusted for inflation, were found to be \$11,000 for Iraq and Afghanistan, while the difference during the Korean War was \$5,500, and during the Vietnam War, the gap was \$8,200.¹⁵ Further disparity can be seen among the casualty rates between officers and enlisted personnel, with casualty rates among infantry and enlisted “more inversely related to community wealth and education than non-infantry and officer casualty rates.”¹⁶

When looking at our nation’s 22 million living veterans,¹⁷ either from prior eras or our current conflicts, it is evident that reintegration into civilian life can present challenges, particularly as there grows an increasing cultural divide between those who served and those who did not.¹⁸ These challenges can be compounded when there are civil legal obstacles that are impacting basic human needs such as housing, healthcare, employment and compensation for disabilities. Further complicating reintegration and an ability to access civil legal services, 1.4 million veterans live below the poverty line, with another 1.4 million living slightly above the poverty line; 50,000 veterans are currently homeless, with another 1.4 million at risk; 45% of those homeless veterans suffer from mental illness;¹⁹ and among

12. See Zucchini & Cloud, *supra* note 7 (stating that “less than one-half of 1% of the U.S. population is in the armed services today”).

13. *Id.*

14. Douglas L. Kriner & Francis X. Shen, *Invisible Inequality: The Two Americas of Military Sacrifice*, 46 U. MEM. L. REV. 545, 546 (2016).

15. *Id.* at 560.

16. *Id.* at 568.

17. See U.S. DEP’T OF VETERAN AFFAIRS, BUDGET IN BRIEF 2 (2016), <http://www.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/Fy2017-BudgetInBrief.pdf> (“As of September 30, 2015, there were an estimated 22 million Veterans living in the United States and its territories and other locations.”).

18. See Zucchini & Cloud, *supra* note 7 (“The U.S. military today is gradually becoming a separate warrior class, many analysts say, that is becoming increasingly distinct from the public it is charged with protecting.”).

19. Rishi Manchanda, Shannon Murphy, Ellen Lawton & Margaret Middleton, *The Invisible Battlefield: Veterans Facing Health-Harming Legal Needs in Civilian Life*, NAT’L

veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, 18.5% suffer from post-traumatic stress or depression, and 19% suffer from traumatic brain injury.²⁰ Additionally, socioeconomic factors can increase a veteran's risk factors for depression, PTSD, substance abuse, and other mental health issues, because lower income levels may correlate to less support from family and community when the veteran returns and increased adjustment difficulty for family members while the veteran is serving.²¹ Any of the foregoing risk factors can complicate reintegration and potentially lead to civil and criminal legal needs.

Veterans facing mental illness, poverty and homelessness are unlikely to identify their needs as legal in nature, and even if they do, finding available pro bono or low cost legal assistance in time to make a difference can be impossible in a country where nearly 30% of our population qualified for civil legal aid in 2015.²²

In addition, while many men and women who serve in our military do so without life-changing injuries, millions are not that fortunate.²³ In order to compensate those who suffer from service-connected disabilities, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is responsible for managing a disability compensation process and adjudicating decisions regarding the claims submitted.²⁴ The VA has received a record number of claims in recent years.²⁵ This is likely a combination of aging Vietnam-era veterans with worsening conditions or newly recognized symptoms now that they are

CTR. FOR MED. LEGAL P'SHIP 4 (2016), <http://medical-legalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Invisible-Battlefield.pdf>.

20. T. Tanielian & LH Jaycox, *Invisible Wounds: Mental Health and Cognitive Care Needs of America's Returning Veterans*, RAND CORP. 2 (2008), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/2008/RAND_RB9336.pdf.

21. See Kriner & Shen, *supra* note 14, at 577–78.

22. See LEGAL SERVS. CORP., 2015 ANNUAL REPORT 2 (2015), <https://lsc-live.app.box.com/v/LSC-2015-AnnualReport> (stating that more than 61 million Americans qualified for civil legal aid in 2015; 30 million additional Americans qualified because they spent at least two months at or below 125% of the federal poverty guideline). See also *Serving Those Who Have Served Our Country: How Legal Aid Helps Veterans*, LEGAL SERVS. CORP. (May 12, 2015), <http://www.lsc.gov/media-center/galleries-multimedia/video/congressional-briefing-serving-those-who-have-served-our> (stating that in 2014, LSC assisted 120,000 veterans).

23. See U.S. DEP'T OF VETERAN AFFAIRS, *supra* note 17, at 1 (stating that in the 2017 Budget, the agency will operate a program that will provide disability compensation benefits for 4.4 million veterans and 405,000 survivors, and a pension benefits program for 297,000 veterans with disabilities and 210,000 survivors).

24. See *id.* at 8.

25. Tom Philpott, *Number of VA Claims Explodes*, MILITARY.COM: THE MIL. ADVANTAGE BLOG (Aug. 28, 2014), <http://militaryadvantage.military.com/2014/08/cbo-why-va-claims-exploded-and-ways-to-slow-the-trend/>.

retiring, and veterans from current conflicts who are suffering from invisible injuries received in a non-traditional conflict without easily identifiable front lines, yet surviving those injuries as a result of advancement in battlefield medicine. Because of advancements in blood clotting agents and more sophisticated and earlier medical treatment, service members deployed in the current conflicts who receive medical treatment are surviving at a rate of 95%.²⁶ More often than not, this high number of veterans returning home with disabilities can benefit significantly from legal assistance in preparing their disability compensation claims, or appealing unsatisfactory decisions from the VA.

II. LEGAL NEEDS OF VETERANS

Veterans often have civil legal needs that go unmet. In the VA's annual CHALENG survey of homeless veterans, five of the top ten unmet needs of male homeless veterans require civil legal assistance; for female homeless veterans, four of the top ten unmet needs warranted civil legal assistance.²⁷ For male homeless veterans, unmet legal needs include issues involving eviction and foreclosure, driver's license restoration, child support issues, outstanding warrants and fines, and financial guardianship.²⁸ A sixth unmet need is for a discharge upgrade, a process that is complicated enough that legal assistance is advisable.²⁹ For female homeless veterans, the unmet legal needs included all that were noted by male veterans, except for financial guardianship.³⁰ Discharge upgrade also made the list for female homeless veterans.³¹

In addition to the civil legal needs identified among homeless veterans in the annual CHALENG survey, and other civil legal needs prompted by deployment or reintegration challenges, veterans suffering from service-

26. Alan Cullison, *On Distant Battlefields, Survival Odds Rise Sharply*, WALL ST. J. (Apr. 2, 2010), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704655004575114623837930294>.

27. See VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION FACT SHEET: PROJECT CHALENG – COMMUNITY HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENT, LOCAL EDUCATION AND NETWORKING GROUPS, DEP'T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS 1, 5–6 (June 2016), <http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/CHALENG-2015-factsheet-FINAL-0616.pdf> [hereinafter PROJECT CHALENG]. The 2016 survey period is currently open.

28. *Id.* at 5.

29. See PROJECT CHALENG, *supra* note 27; Kathy Gilberd, *Discharge Upgrading – An Outline for Beginners*, MIL. LAW TASK FORCE (June 2014), <http://nlgmlf.org/military-law-library/publications/discharge-upgrades/>.

30. See PROJECT CHALENG, *supra* note 27, at 5–6.

31. See *id.*

connected disabilities face complicated processes for preparing their initial disability compensation claims with the VA, or appealing those claims, both processes that can benefit from legal assistance.³² Despite the advantages to the veteran of having an attorney represent him or her in the complicated claims process, paid attorney involvement is only allowed after an initial agency decision is made by the VA and the veteran has filed his or her Notice of Disagreement.³³ This is because the VA disability claims process is supposedly designed to be a non-adversarial system, and the VA has a “duty to assist” veterans in filing their claims, which includes helping them to obtain supporting documentation and informing veterans of evidence that would help them prove their claims.³⁴ In reality, with the tremendous increase in claims at the VA,³⁵ and the significant backlog,³⁶ the VA’s ability to assist is severely limited at best. In fact, claims processors just concluded three years of mandatory overtime in December 2015, and voluntary overtime is still in place in order to keep processing levels between 4,500 and 5,200 cases per day.³⁷

Veterans preparing their claims without assistance from the VA, or from experienced and accredited attorneys or agents, often end up submitting claims that the VA deems to lack adequate evidence to establish: (1) the existence of a disability; (2) the severity of that disability; (3) an injury, illness or incident in service; and (4) the nexus between that injury or illness and the current disability. Without evidence proving each of those factors,

32. See Daniel L. Nagin, *Goals vs. Deadlines: Notes on the VA Disability Claims Backlog*, 10 U. MASS. L. REV. 50, 62 (2015) (stating the complexity of veterans’ benefits is a reason for the benefits backlog); DEP’T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, BOARD OF VETERANS’ APPEALS ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2015 (2016), <http://www.va.gov/finance/docs/afr/2015VAafrFullWeb.pdf> [hereinafter VETERANS’ APPEALS ANNUAL REPORT] (illustrating that veterans represented by attorneys had a higher percentage of allowed claims and of remanded claims (86.3% together) at the appellate level, with the least percentage of denied appellate claims (10.1%), when compared with unrepresented veterans, or those represented by non-attorney agents).

33. See 38 C.F.R. § 14.636(c) (2016).

34. U.S. DEP’T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, VETERAN APPEALS EXPERIENCE: LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF VETERANS AND THEIR JOURNEY IN THE APPEALS SYSTEM 7 (January 2016), http://www.innovation.va.gov/docs/VOV_Appeals_FINAL_20160115.pdf [hereinafter VETERANS APPEALS EXPERIENCE].

35. See *id.* at 1 (stating that over one million veterans file claims with the VA annually for benefits); see also Philpott, *supra* note 25.

36. See Leo Shane III, *VA Disability Backlog Tops 70,000 — 7 Months After it was Supposed to be Zero*, MILITARY TIMES (July 10, 2016), <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/veterans/2016/07/10/va-disability-claims-backlog-veterans-affairs/86862716/> (stating in July 2016, the number of claims backlogged at the VA exceeded 70,000).

37. See *id.*

including applicable medical evidence, a veteran's claim will be unsuccessful, but may still be appealed.³⁸ On appeal, once a Notice of Disagreement is filed, a veteran may hire an attorney, but by then, the veteran has waited a significant time for the VA to consider and deny his or her initial claim,³⁹ and the VA has expended resources deciding a claim they deem unsubstantiated with the evidence provided. Presently, the VA and veterans seeking disability compensation are facing a crushing backlog at the appellate level. Recent reports note that 440,000 veterans have appeals pending, 80,000 veterans have appeals older than five years, 5,000 veterans have appeals older than ten years,⁴⁰ and veterans awaiting an appeal decision today will wait as many as seven years for the BVA to decide their case once appealed.⁴¹

III. LAW SCHOOL CLINICS ON THE FRONT LINE FOR VETERANS

One robust resource providing access to justice for underrepresented parties across the country can be found in the clinical programs in our nation's law schools, where law students and professors engage in experiential learning and the provision of legal services on a pro bono basis.⁴² As law schools comply with the new six credit experiential learning requirement of the American Bar Association,⁴³ and legal education tries to meet the demands of students seeking more skills teaching prior to

38. One hundred thousand veterans file appeals annually. See VETERANS' APPEALS ANNUAL REPORT, *supra* note 32, at 17, 25.

39. DEP'T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, DETAILED CLAIMS DATA (2016), http://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/detailed_claims_data.asp (stating as of September 24, 2016, the average number of days to complete a non-fully-developed claim was 130.3 days; the fully-developed claims, which are meant to be a quicker path to a decision, were averaging 115.5 days to complete). See also Leo Shane III, *supra* note 36, at 2-3 (stating that as recently as three years ago, the backlog topped 600,000, thus, wait times for decisions often exceeded a year).

40. VETERANS' APPEALS EXPERIENCE, *supra* note 34, at 5.

41. *Id.* at 19.

42. See Robert R. Kuehn & David A. Santacroce, *Center for the Study of Applied Legal Education (CSALE) 2013-14 Survey of Applied Legal Education*, CTR. FOR THE STUDY OF APPLIED LEGAL EDUC. 7 (2015), http://www.csale.org/files/Report_on_2013-14_CSALE_Survey.pdf (stating of the 173 law schools that responded to the 2013-14 survey, a total of 1322 distinct law clinics were reported as being offered in Fall 2013, with seven clinics on average at each school).

43. *Managing Director's Guidance Memo: Standards 303(a)(3), 303(b), and 304*, ABA (Mar. 2015), http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/governancedocuments/2015_standards_303_304_experiential_course_requirement_authcheckdam.pdf.

practice,⁴⁴ opportunities for students to provide legal assistance to clients through law school clinics are increasing. In 2012-2013, it is estimated that students in law school clinics provided 3.4 million hours of pro bono civil legal assistance, and served 70,000 clients.⁴⁵ One population that has benefitted from an increase in support and civil legal services from law school clinics is veterans and service members.

In 2008, there were approximately half a dozen law school clinics across the country focused on the legal needs of veterans and service members.⁴⁶ That was also the time period that Professor Stacey-Rae Simcox, and her husband, Mark Mathews, former Army JAG attorneys and alumni of William & Mary Law School's Class of 1999, decided to launch a clinic focused on helping veterans with disabilities file their compensation claims, particularly at the agency level where attorneys are not allowed to be paid.⁴⁷ The clinic would eventually be named after Vietnam veteran, Marine, and Pulitzer Prize winning author of the novel, *Fortunate Son*, Lewis B. Puller, Jr., as a memorial gift by his classmates in William & Mary Law School's Class of 1974.⁴⁸

The Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic at William & Mary (Puller Clinic) joined forces at its inception with Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Psychological Services and Development (CPSD) and their director at the time, Dr. Leticia Flores, creating a model where veterans would be treated holistically across disciplines and institutions.⁴⁹ The Puller Clinic was the first law school veterans' clinic in the country to address both the legal and psychological needs of veterans, and it took advantage of graduate students at both institutions in providing these

44. *Pre-Law Students Want More Experimental Learning, Fewer Years*, NAT'L JURIST (Feb. 12, 2014), <http://www.nationaljurist.com/content/pre-law-students-want-more-experimental-learning-fewer-years>.

45. See Kuehn & Santacroce, *supra* note 42, at 26-27.

46. This figure and others in this Article related to law school veterans' clinics are known to the author as a result of information solicited from all clinics serving veterans and service members of which the Puller Clinic is aware, data which is kept updated on a list maintained by the Puller Clinic in Williamsburg, Virginia.

47. DEP'T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL, ACCREDITATION, <http://www.va.gov/ogc/accreditation.asp> (stating that no person or organization may charge claimants a fee for assistance in preparing applications or presenting claims for benefits to VA; fees may only be charged for assisting a veteran after the VA issues a decision on a claim and the veteran has filed a Notice of Disagreement that appeals that decision).

48. *W&M Law Clinic for Veterans to be Named for Puller*, WILLIAMSBURG YORKTOWN DAILY (Nov. 10, 2010), <http://wydailyarchives.com/2010/11/10/wam-law-clinic-for-veterans-to-be-named-for-puller/>.

49. *CPSD and Puller Clinic Celebrate Five Years of Collaboration*, VA. COMMONWEALTH U., <http://has.vcu.edu/cpsd-and-puller-clinic/>.

necessary interdisciplinary services.⁵⁰ The Puller Clinic quickly grew to capacity both in student enrollment and veteran clients, and its interdisciplinary model became one hailed by clinic champions such as Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, who considered the clinic model a “win-win-win,” for students, veterans, and the VA, respectively.⁵¹ Since its inception, the Puller Clinic has represented more than 150 veteran clients in long-term representation in over 1,000 claims. For claims adjudicated thus far by the VA, the Puller Clinic procured more than a 60% increase in benefits for veteran clients; recovered earned and owed back compensation benefits for veteran clients of nearly \$1 million, with a present value of benefits over their lifetimes of more than \$20 million; provided advice and counsel and made referrals to hundreds of additional veterans; and trained more than 200 law students in veterans benefits law, many of whom continue to represent veterans on a pro bono basis after they graduate.⁵² The students and attorneys of the Puller Clinic provide more than half a million dollars annually in pro bono legal services.⁵³

As our nation’s time at war continued unabated, and more attention was being paid to our veterans returning home and needing assistance, additional law schools expressed interest in serving this deserving population. The Puller Clinic and the more senior clinics that existed prior to 2008⁵⁴ worked collaboratively to encourage and support the development of additional law school veteran and service member clinics. The Puller Clinic was asked by

50. See Ashley Kelly & Peter Dujardin, *W&M Veterans Benefit Clinic Gaining Recognition*, DAILY PRESS (May 26, 2013), http://articles.dailypress.com/2013-05-26/news/dp-crime-notebook-201320130526_1_puller-jr-veterans-benefit-clinic-mary-law-school.

51. See Sen. Warner Calls for Nationwide Expansion of Vets Legal Clinics, OFFICE OF SENATOR MARK R. WARNER (Aug. 29, 2014), http://www.warner.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/mobile/pressreleases?ContentRecord_id=64b0a3a0-ae28-4806-89d2-26b9018b8272.

52. Puller Clinic metrics are calculated based on data collected from class enrollment information and actual client files; the spreadsheet, updated most recently in August 2016, is available on file at the Puller Clinic. The data collection methods were created by a team of students, K.N. Barrett, Ian Mahoney, and Jaclyn Petruzzelli from the Thomas Jefferson Public Policy Program at William & Mary in 2012.

53. *Id.*

54. These include clinics serving veterans and/or service members of George Mason University School of Law, Georgetown University Law Center (in conjunction with the National Veterans Legal Services Program), North Carolina Central University School of Law, the John Marshall School of Law, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, and Widener Law School. See e.g., *Veterans Law Clinics*, VETERANS CONSORTIUM PRO BONO PROGRAM (Mar. 2013), <http://www.vetsprobono.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Law-Clinics-2013.pdf> (listing veterans’ benefits clinics available in 2013).

the White House to prepare a Playbook that would encourage other law schools to start veterans' clinics,⁵⁵ and hosted the National Conference on Law Clinics Serving Veterans in Washington D.C. in 2014, where more than 140 representatives from forty law schools, as well as attorneys from law firms and corporations, gathered to learn more about starting veteran and military serving programs from a number of clinics already providing such services.⁵⁶ Also in April 2014, the Puller Clinic started a listserv to provide a forum for asking substantive law questions and to connect non-profit legal service providers nationwide in order to share best practices, make referrals, and support attorneys and law students starting new programs. This listserv remains a robust discussion forum regularly enriched by the expertise and inquiries of more than 400 members, all providing pro bono legal services to veterans.⁵⁷

As the law school military and veteran clinic community started growing, so too did collegiality and support among its members and the desire to create opportunities for collaboration. In 2015, the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) Clinical Conference Planning Committee agreed to add a working group for military and veterans' clinics; both conferences since then have included more than a dozen experienced veteran and military law clinicians, and those interested in starting such clinics, regularly meeting throughout the conference. The group quickly realized that their efficacy in support of their veteran and military clients could continue to be improved through more formal collaboration. Two federal relations advisors who had worked on a pro bono basis for the Puller Clinic since 2010 suggested that the clinics start the National Law School Veterans Clinic Consortium (NLSVCC)⁵⁸ in order "to provide a unified voice to

55. See STACEY RAE SIMCOX, JOHN PAUL CIMINO, DIANA COOPER, KEVIN BARRETT, & PATRICIA ROBERTS, *PULLER CLINIC PLAY BOOK* (2013).

56. See Hugh Lessig, *William and Mary Hosts Military Veterans Conference in Washington*, DAILY PRESS (Apr. 3, 2014), http://articles.dailypress.com/2014-04-03/news/dp-ews-veterans-law-conference-20140403_1_puller-clinic-backlogged-claim-law-school.

57. Moderated by the Puller Clinic, the listserv is for members only with administrative approval. Membership is limited to those who are providing a significant portion of their services to veterans pro bono (for instance, we exclude private attorneys engaged in fee generating work for veterans, unless they are providing a substantial amount of work pro bono as well, or working with a law school clinic). See *Mail List Service*, WM. & MARY, <https://lists.wm.edu/wws/info/veteransclinics> (last visited Oct. 15, 2016).

58. See *Second Annual National Conference on Law Clinics Serving Veterans to Be Held in Washington, D.C.*, WM. & MARY (Oct. 31, 2015), <https://law.wm.edu/news/stories/2015/second-annual-national-conference-on-law-clinics-serving-veterans-to-be-held-in-washington,-d.c.-.php>. Pro bono federal relations advisors include Christopher DeLacy of Holland & Knight LLP and Douglas Dziak of Nixon Peabody LLP, both graduates from William & Mary Law School's Class of 1999; they have been aided

identify and advance the needs of the law school veterans' clinics, and more importantly, the veterans they serve before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Congress, and other federal entities."⁵⁹ The original twenty-five members of the informal Consortium joined forces to host the Second Annual National Law School Clinics Serving Veterans Conference in November 2015.⁶⁰ Fifty-five schools from the informal coalition supported the development of the Consortium, and the NLSVCC was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) corporation as of September 22, 2016.⁶¹ The NLSVCC members have worked together, often in collaboration with other non-profit groups such as the Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program,⁶² Connecticut Veterans Legal Center,⁶³ Swords to Plowshares,⁶⁴ and the National Veterans Legal Services Program,⁶⁵ to raise awareness about the challenges being faced by veterans and service members, and promote positive systemic change. Such activities include the filing of amicus briefs addressing topics important to the veteran clients they serve,⁶⁶ supporting petitions for rulemaking,⁶⁷

in creation of the NLSVCC by Andrew Emerson of Holland & Knight LLP and Michael Barnicle of Duane Morris LLP, both veterans.

59. See MISSION STATEMENT OF NVLSCC, <http://www.nlsvcc.org/> (last visited Nov. 13, 2016).

60. See 2D ANNUAL NAT'L L. SCH. CLINICS SERVING VETERANS CONF., <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07ebjbitow080e29e0&llr=78kmlxpab> (last visited Oct. 18, 2016).

61. Articles of Incorporation, bylaws, and certificate of incorporation are on file with the author.

62. See *Law Clinic Partners & Law Students*, VETERANS CONSORTIUM PRO BONO PROGRAM, <http://www.vetsprobono.org/law-clinics-students/>.

63. See CONN. VETERANS LEGAL CTR., <http://ctveteranslegal.org> (last visited Oct. 18, 2016).

64. See SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES, <https://www.swords-to-plowshares.org/> (last visited Oct. 18, 2016).

65. See NAT'L VETERANS LEGAL SERVS. PROGRAM, <http://www.nvlsp.org> (last visited Oct. 18, 2016).

66. For instance, in 2016, Professor Angela Drake and her students from the University of Missouri School of Law Veterans Clinic argued on behalf of members of the NLSVCC, which co-authored an amicus brief in the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. See *Robinson Jr. v. McDonald*, No. 15-0715 (Vet. App. 1999) (determining whether the VA has a duty to produce a veteran's paper claims file because the electronic file, not the original paper source documents, is what the Board reviewed following the scanning of the paper file into the VA's electronic filing system). See also *Veterans Clinic*, U. MO. SCH. L., <https://law.missouri.edu/jd/skills/veterans-clinic/> (discussing the type of work that the clinic undertakes).

67. Many NLSVCC members recently supported the work of the Veterans Legal Clinic of the Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School, which, along with the National Veterans Legal Services Program and Swords to Plowshares, submitted a Petition for Rulemaking to change the VA's character of discharge regulations. *Veterans Legal Clinic Publishes Report, Files Rulemaking Petition on Access to the VA for Veterans with Bad-Paper Discharges*,

authoring op-eds, conveying issues of importance to their congressional members, liaising with the VA, and collaborating on articles, presentations, and books, often incorporating law student involvement.⁶⁸

Given that there are 1322 distinct law school clinics across the country,⁶⁹ it is likely that clinics that have a focus on a substantive area of the law outside of military and veterans' law still see some percentage of military and veteran clients.⁷⁰ But since 2008, there has been a proliferation of law school clinics and other pro bono programs that are focused almost exclusively on serving veterans and service members with their legal issues; as of summer 2016, there were more than fifty such clinics and programs in operation or development,⁷¹ over an 80% increase from eight years earlier. The programs that exist today are located in thirty-one states and the District of Columbia.⁷² Although they may have different models or legal services they are providing, they are serving a common population, those who have worn, or are wearing, the uniform. In addition to those providing civil legal services to veterans and service members, many are also providing assistance with veterans' benefits claims; a third of those are also assisting veterans with discharge upgrades. Some law schools are affiliated with local courts, helping justice-involved veterans in veteran treatment or therapeutic courts.⁷³ Additionally, some clinics are serving veterans through a medical-legal partnership model, including some co-located at VA Medical Centers.

LEGAL SERV. CTR. HARV. L. SCH. (Apr. 19, 2016), <http://www.legalservicescenter.org/veterans-legal-clinic-publishes-report-files-rulemaking-petition-on-access-to-the-va-for-veterans-with-bad-paper-discharges/>.

68. Additional examples of such collaborative work on file with the author.

69. Kuehn & Santacroce, *supra* note 42.

70. William & Mary Law School's Elder and Disability Law Clinic, Family Law Clinic, and Special Education and Advocacy Clinics have all represented service member and veteran clients.

71. The list the Puller Clinic has compiled of law school initiatives focused on helping veterans and service members includes not just clinics, though a majority of the programs are clinics, but also dedicated externships and pro bono initiatives that may or may not be credit-bearing. List of programs and services offered is maintained by the Puller Clinic and was last updated in Fall 2016. It is on file with the author.

72. States without dedicated law school service member or veterans' clinics or programs, according to data kept by the Puller Clinic, include Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Utah. Several law schools located in a number of these states have contacted Consortium members seeking information on starting clinics or programs serving veterans and service members.

73. See, e.g., *Veterans Advoc. L. Clinic*, UNIV. ARIZ. JAMES E. ROGERS COLL. OF L., http://www.law2.arizona.edu/clinics/Veterans_Advocacy_Clinic.cfm; *Veterans Legal Support Ctr. & Clinic*, JOHN MARSHALL L. SCH., <http://www.jmls.edu/clinics/veterans/>.

Even for those veterans and service members who may not be suffering from a disability, those who are facing civil legal issues without assistance may find their health impacted by the stress of those experiences. The Legal Services Corporation and the American Bar Association report that each low-income individual in the U.S. has an average of two to three civil legal needs that can negatively impact health, which translates to 50 million people.⁷⁴ There is an increasing amount of data that supports the theory that providing civil legal services can positively impact health and well-being, so much so that there are now hundreds of medical-legal partnership models that work across disciplines to provide both legal and healthcare assistance.⁷⁵ By addressing the social determinants of health through legal assistance, studies show that individuals with chronic illnesses are hospitalized less, patients are more compliant with healthcare directives, less money is spent on healthcare, and the satisfaction among healthcare workers improves.⁷⁶ In the first study to explore the impact of medical-legal partnerships on the mental health and well-being of veterans, early results show statistically significant improvements in measures of well-being among the veterans receiving this interdisciplinary model of care.⁷⁷ At the VA Connecticut System's Errera Community Care Center in West Haven, Connecticut, the Connecticut Legal Services Center, which often works closely with Yale's Veterans Legal Services Clinic,⁷⁸ is co-located and provides civil legal assistance.⁷⁹ The offer of legal assistance often brings in veterans who are then introduced to and begin to take advantage of the healthcare services available to them at Errera. Moreover, the healthcare team finds that because

74. See NAT'L CTR. FOR MED.-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP, <http://medical-legalpartnership.org/> (last visited Oct. 18, 2016) (citing that there are now 294 health care institutions in forty-one states with developed medical-legal partnerships). See also Lara K. Eilhardt, *VA & Veterans Legal Access*, U.S. DEP'T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF GEN. COUNS. (Aug. 18, 2016, 9:30 AM), <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVAOGC/bulletins/15d246e> (noting that the VA has embraced the idea of medical-legal partnerships and established a VA MLP Task Force in March 2016).

75. See *Benefits of Integrated Care*, NAT'L CTR. FOR MED.-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP, <http://medical-legalpartnership.org/need/>.

76. See Robert Pettignano, Sylvia B. Caley & Susan McLaren, *The Health Law Partnership: Adding a Lawyer to the Health Care Team Reduces System Costs and Improves Provider Satisfaction*, 18(4) J. PUB. HEALTH MGMT. & PRAC. E1, E1-E3 (2012).

77. See Rishi Manchanda, Shannon Murphy, Ellen Lawton & Margaret Middleton, *The Invisible Battlefield: Veterans Facing Health-Harming Legal Needs in Civilian Life*, NAT'L CTR. FOR MED.-LEGAL P'SHIP 1, 12-13 (June 2016).

78. See *Veterans Legal Services Clinic*, YALE L. SCH., <https://www.law.yale.edu/clinics/vlsc> (last visited Oct. 18, 2016).

79. Pettignano et al., *supra* note 76, at 14.

“[L]egal issues take a significant mental and emotional toll on individuals and are often intertwined with health,” resolving legal issues can positively impact health outcomes.⁸⁰

Medical-legal partnerships are also expanding among law school clinics serving veterans and service members. In addition to those that have developed between graduate schools, like the Puller Clinic’s medical-legal partnership (MLP) with graduate psychology clinics at Virginia Commonwealth University and George Mason University, and Stetson College of Law’s partnership with the University of South Florida’s Morsani School of Medicine,⁸¹ additional MLPs are being co-located in VA Medical Centers, some of which are affiliated with law school clinics. As of 2016, there were over 135 legal providers in VA medical centers, community clinics, and Vet Centers, including twelve MLPs.⁸² Among the legal providers located in VA facilities, fifteen have involvement from law school programs.⁸³

The programs serving veterans and service members throughout many of the nation’s law schools are diverse, with some led by full-time faculty, others led by adjunct faculty, and still others in partnership with legal services offices.⁸⁴ There are formal law school clinics, where academic credit is awarded for legal work performed under supervision of a licensed and accredited attorney/professor; externship models where students work in a field placement supporting legal services for veterans and service members; and pro bono programs that do not involve credit but involve student volunteers. Some of the law school clinics have received state or private support, while others are actively fundraising to ensure their continued operation. Services provided range from one-time advice and counsel to individual clients, full long-term representation, and legislative and appellate advocacy focused on systemic change. All of the existing law school programs serving veterans and service members share resources to

80. *Id.* at 14–15.

81. Stacey-Rae Simcox, *Lightening the VA’s Rucksack: A Proposal for Higher Education Medical-Legal Partnerships to Assist the VA in Efficiently and Accurately Granting Veterans Disability Compensation*, 25 CORNELL J.L. & PUB. POL’Y 141, 176 (2015).

82. U.S. DEP’T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, FREE LEGAL CLINICS IN VA FACILITIES (2016), <https://www.va.gov/ogc/docs/LegalServices.pdf>. See also Allie Yang-Green & Karen Lash, *Federal Government As Your Partner: What Advocates Should Know About Federal Resources for Veterans’ Legal Aid*, 68 S.C. LAW REV. 209, 219 (2017).

83. *Free Legal Clinics in VA Facilities*, VA.GOV, <http://www.va.gov/ogc/docs/LegalServices.pdf> (last updated Oct. 2016).

84. List of programs and services offered is maintained by the Puller Clinic and was last updated in Fall 2016. It is on file with the author.

encourage development of additional law school programs and assist one another to ensure best practices.

Although much could be said about each distinct law school program, this Article will highlight four innovative legal service models for veterans and active-duty service members. The first is Military Mondays, a partnership that started between the Puller Clinic, Starbucks, and their Armed Services Network in June 2015.⁸⁵ Professors and students from the Puller Clinic provide one-hour advice and counsel to service members and veterans seeking legal assistance regarding their disability compensation claims and discharge upgrades related to service-connected disabilities twice monthly on Mondays at Starbucks.⁸⁶ Military Mondays has now expanded to thirty locations in twenty-one different states, and includes financial services and employment transition skills such as resume and interview preparation in some locations.⁸⁷ The Puller Clinic Military Mondays' model has, since its inception, provided legal advice and counsel to more than 200 veterans and service members, and the annual value of pro bono services exceeds \$45,000.⁸⁸ Military Mondays received the American Bar Association's 2016 Brown Select Award for its innovation in providing pro bono legal services.⁸⁹

The Nova Southeastern College of Law started the first legal incubator program in the nation that focuses on veterans and their legal needs in April 2016, and it works in partnership with their Veterans Law Clinic.⁹⁰ The NSU Shepard Broad College of Law's incubator helps young attorneys start their own practice by providing one year of shared and subsidized space, the mentorship of other attorneys, and training and continuing education in a diverse selection of topics pertinent to the development of a solo or small practice.⁹¹ Rather than pay a cost for participation in the incubator,

85. Suzanne Seurattan, *W&M's Puller Clinic Partners with Starbucks for Veterans Outreach*, WM. & MARY L. SCH. (May 29, 2015), <http://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2015/wms-puller-clinic-partners-with-starbucks-for-veterans-outreach.php>.

86. *Id.*

87. On file with author.

88. On file with author.

89. *Military Mondays Expand Across the Country*, WM. & MARY L. SCH. (Mar. 31, 2016), <http://law.wm.edu/news/stories/2016/military-mondays-expand-across-the-country.php>.

90. *NSU Law Incubator Program*, NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIV. <https://www.law.nova.edu/career/incubator.html> (last visited Nov. 7, 2016). Additional details about the Program were obtained from documents shared by the incubator director, Jayme Cassidy, on September 28, 2016, including the NSU Shepard Broad College of Law Legal Incubator Reference Guide, which is on file with the author.

91. *Legal Incubator Program to Benefit NSU Law Graduates While Providing Services to Veterans and the Community*, NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIV.,

participants provide 200 hours of pro bono work to indigent clients and offer reduced fees to modest-means clients, both of which help provide access to justice for veterans.

Two additional veteran and service member clinics that leverage the assistance of community partner resources to maximize assistance to their underserved populations include the Florida Coastal School of Law, which runs The Veterans Legal Collaborative (VLC), and Syracuse University's College of Law Veterans Legal Clinic, which participates in "Valor" Day, or Veterans Advocacy Law and Outreach.⁹² The VLC is a project of Florida Coastal School of Law, Jacksonville Area Legal Aid's Northeast Florida Medical Legal Partnership, Three Rivers Legal Services, the Veterans Affairs Clinic and the Wounded Warrior Project, all of which work together to provide free civil legal services for low-income veterans.⁹³ The VLC provides twenty to thirty-minute consultations one Friday each month during the law school's academic year, and attorneys provide brief advice and counsel to the veterans, and identify whether there is merit to their cases, whether the veterans can proceed pro se, or if longer term representation is warranted with a volunteer attorney. Syracuse College of Law started a Veterans Legal Clinic in January 2015 that provides legal assistance to veterans during the complex disability compensation process and assists veterans with discharge upgrades.⁹⁴ In addition, the Clinic participates in the College of Law's "Valor Day" where local attorneys, financial advisors, and career service representatives provide free assistance to veterans, service members, and their families, and host a veterans' information fair with participation from more than ten veteran and government organizations.⁹⁵

<https://nsunews.nova.edu/legal-incubator-program-to-benefit-nsu-law-graduates-while-providing-services-to-veterans-and-the-community/> (last visited Oct. 18, 2016).

92. Robert Conrad, *Syracuse Law to Host Seventh 'Valor Day' for Veterans, Service Members, Families*, SYRACUSE UNIV. NEWS (Sept. 7, 2016), <http://news.syr.edu/syracuse-law-to-host-seventh-valor-day-for-veterans-service-members-families-98546/>; Kathy Para, *Pro Bono Spotlight: Law Firms Needed to Staff Veterans Intake Day*, FIN. NEWS & DAILY REC. (July 20, 2015), http://jaxdailyrecord.com/showstory.php?Story_id=545810.

93. Para, *supra* note 92.

94. Lyndy McLaughlin, *Veterans Legal Clinic: Free Legal Advice for Veterans Through Syracuse University College of Law*, VOICES: IMVF BLOG (Mar. 9, 2015), <http://vets.syr.edu/veterans-legal-clinic-free-legal-advice-for-veterans-through-syracuse-university-college-of-law/>.

95. Conrad, *supra* note 92.

IV. THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION IS SENDING REINFORCEMENTS

Just as the legal needs of service members and veterans are increasingly a priority with law school clinics, they are also a significant priority of the American Bar Association (ABA).⁹⁶ The ABA adopted, in recent years, policies which have supported, among other things, legal services for veterans and service members, creation of veteran law clinics at all law schools, Veterans' Treatment Courts, access to adequate mental health and substance use disorder treatment services and coverage for veterans, jurisdictional issues in the courts, employment and re-employment of returning veterans, disability and survivor benefits, and veteran legal representation.⁹⁷ In addition, several far-reaching initiatives have focused the efforts of ABA members on the legal needs of these deserving populations and encouraged them to provide their services on a pro bono basis.

Most significant recently, however, is the ABA's Veterans Legal Services Initiative (VLSI), which is, according to Linda Klein, ABA President for 2016–2017, positioning the ABA “to lead a holistic, sustainable effort to ensure that veterans have access to justice and receive the legal support they, their families, and their caregivers deserve.”⁹⁸ VLSI will address these legal needs by creating centralized resources, developing policy, and supporting the delivery of legal services.⁹⁹ The VLSI Commission, established in August 2016, is led by Co-Chairs Nanette M. DeRenzi, Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.), and Dwight L. Smith, Dwight L. Smith LLP, Tulsa, OK, and includes special advisors and liaisons, sixteen Commissioners from across the country, and ABA staff.¹⁰⁰

During the course of the Initiative, the VLSI is collaborating with state and local bar associations, law schools, government and legal aid agencies, existing ABA programs and committees, and additional public and private

96. The author is speaking in her individual capacity in this Article. Although the author is serving as a Commissioner on the Veterans Legal Services Initiative (VLSI), this Article represents the author's understanding of the existing ABA initiatives serving veterans and service members, and newly proposed initiatives; nothing in this Article is intended to represent the views of the larger ABA.

97. ABA Policies Affecting Military Veterans (as of February 25, 2016), Veterans Legal Services Initiative Agenda Book, 12–15, on file with author.

98. *ABA Veterans Legal Services Initiative*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/committees/veterans_benefits.html.

99. *Initiative: Needs, Vision, Mission and Goals*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/committees/veterans_benefits/veterans_goals.html [hereinafter *Initiative*].

100. *VLSI Commission Roster*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/committees/veterans_benefits/vets_commissionroster.html. The author is proud to be included on the Commission, working alongside a dynamic group of enthusiastic and distinguished Co-Commissioners.

partners to better serve the legal needs of veterans.¹⁰¹ The collaborations built during the Initiative's year will help provide the foundation for a long-planned National Military and Veterans Legal Services Network.¹⁰² The proposed Network will leverage the resources of existing national, state, and local services providers in order to increase access to legal services for veterans, service members, and their families, survivors and caregivers, and will establish standards and implement training to ensure that competent holistic services are available to support these populations.¹⁰³ The planning of the Network began with a two-day summit in June 2016, sponsored by the Bob Woodruff Foundation, facilitated by the ABA and Army One Source, held at Jones Day in Washington, D.C. and attended by more than 160 caregivers, veterans, nonprofit leaders, attorneys, health and human service professionals, and members of the military.¹⁰⁴ Interdisciplinary teams met throughout the Summit and addressed issues such as capacity, connectivity, and operations for a proposed Network, ultimately recommending that the collaborative model allow for both legal and non-legal referrals for services, so there are "[n]o more 'dead ends'" for those seeking assistance.¹⁰⁵

In addition to the proposed Network, VLSI plans to provide legal check-up tools for veterans and their families and caregivers and will be building on their already successful ABA Home Front website to increase capacity and enhance its features.¹⁰⁶ Efforts will also be made to expand ABA policies regarding veterans' access to justice, and to advocate for expansion of Veterans Treatment Courts to address civil and criminal legal issues facing veterans, and expansion of legal clinics in VA medical facilities and law schools.¹⁰⁷ VLSI will be highlighting the legal needs of veterans and ways that the practicing Bar and law schools can help to address those needs throughout the year. This includes encouraging deliverables such as the development of additional medical-legal partnerships in support of veterans, increasing the number of law schools with clinics and courses focused on serving veterans and service members, creating toolkits and webinars for those interested in starting such initiatives, and providing resources to

101. *Initiative*, *supra* note 99.

102. *See id.*

103. *See id.*

104. Kate Cook, *Raising the Bar in Veteran Legal Services: Bob Woodruff Foundation Helps Start the Proceedings*, MEDIUM (June 30, 2016), <https://medium.com/we-stand4heroes/raising-the-bar-in-veteran-legal-services-9eb0e5f32d60#.3uomzfqk5>.

105. *Id.*

106. *Initiative*, *supra* note 99.

107. *Id.*

encourage new and existing incubator programs to focus some of their practice on veteran legal needs.¹⁰⁸

The ABA has a strong history of providing opportunities for civilian attorneys to volunteer their time and talent to help veterans and service members on a pro bono basis under the ABA's Military Pro Bono Center. One such initiative is the ABA Military Pro Bono Program, managed by the ABA Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel (LAMP) and operated by ABA staff.¹⁰⁹ The Military Pro Bono Program was established in 2008 and through its website, www.MilitaryProBono.org, accepts referrals from Judge Advocate Generals (JAGs) of junior-enlisted service members who are in need of civil legal assistance.¹¹⁰ Those cases are then referred to pro bono attorneys in the geographic area where the service member is located or services are needed.¹¹¹ In addition, the Program includes an opportunity for attorneys to volunteer to provide lawyer-to-lawyer consultations with JAGs needing assistance in effectively representing their service member clients.¹¹² As part of the Military Pro Bono Program, the ABA has recently established Lawyers for Warriors: Hampton Roads (L4W).¹¹³ L4W focuses efforts on the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, home to the world's largest naval base, Naval Station Norfolk, and the only place in the country that includes the presence of every military branch and NATO. L4W is teaming up civilian attorneys with veterans, service members and JAGs in need of assistance in Hampton Roads, and working in partnership with local law school clinics, including William & Mary's Puller Clinic, as well as the Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia.¹¹⁴

In order to assist veterans with disabilities in their compensation claims, as well as help the VA to address their claims backlog, the ABA established a pilot partnership program for one year starting in summer 2014, whereby volunteer attorneys helped unrepresented veterans complete fully developed claims for an expedited review and rating from the VA.¹¹⁵ The ABA

108. *Id.*

109. ABA MIL. PRO BONO PROJECT, <https://www.militaryprobono.org/> (last visited Oct. 19 2016).

110. *Id.*

111. *Id.*

112. *Id.*

113. *Lawyers for Warriors: Hampton Roads*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/portals/public_resources/aba_home_front/Military_Pro_Bono/aba-lawyers-for-warriors.html.

114. See LEGAL AID SOC'Y EASTERN VA., <http://www.laseva.org/> (last visited Oct. 19, 2016).

115. *ABA Veterans' Claims Assistance Network*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/portals/public_resources/aba_home_front/Military_Pro_Bono/aba-veterans-claims-and-assistance-network.html.

Veterans' Claims Assistance Network (VCAN) was managed by the ABA Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel (LAMP) and operated by an ABA staff attorney. Following its successful pilot, the ABA and the VA are in the process of planning for future iterations of this veteran assistance program.¹¹⁶ The VCAN Program also partnered with law school clinics by engaging them to provide training to volunteer attorneys and to accept veteran claims.¹¹⁷

The ABA hosts an online resource that includes legal information, opportunities for referrals for civil legal matters for service members, veterans and their families, and a state-by-state directory of legal programs on their ABA Home Front website,¹¹⁸ which receives 6000–7000 unique visitors every month.¹¹⁹ The Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel (LAMP) provides additional assistance for service members and their families by holding two free CLE programs at military installations annually, sponsoring additional CLEs and webinars on military and veteran legal assistance issues, publishing books on civil law matters service members are likely to encounter,¹²⁰ and advancing federal legislation impacting the legal rights and services of active-duty military, veterans, and their families.¹²¹ A previous initiative partnered the ABA's Young Lawyers Division with the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law veterans' clinics during 2011–2012. Project Salute: Young Lawyers Serving Veterans included volunteer attorneys educating veterans on their benefit options and

116. *See For Veterans*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/portals/public_resources/aba_home_front/Military_Pro_Bono/aba-veterans-claims-and-assistance-network/VeteransInterim.html.

117. The John Marshall Law School Veterans Legal Support Center and Clinic played a pivotal role in initial case review and assignment. *See A Commitment to Effective Veterans Advocacy*, JOHN MARSHALL L. SCH., <http://www.jmls.edu/clinics/veterans/attorneys.php>.

118. *ABA Home Front*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/portals/public_resources/aba_home_front.html.

119. *Initiative*, *supra* note 99.

120. *See Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_assistance_military_personnel.html. Published books include ABA, *THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION LEGAL GUIDE FOR MILITARY FAMILIES: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FAMILY LAW, ESTATE PLANNING, AND THE SERVICE-MEMBERS CIVIL RELIEF ACT* (2013). Staff from the John Marshall Law School Veterans Legal Support Center and Clinic contributed to the book. *See Publications & Presentations*, JOHN MARSHALL L. SCH., <http://www.jmls.edu/clinics/veterans/publications.php>.

121. *See Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_assistance_military_personnel.html.

helping them to obtain those benefits.¹²² It is hoped that as part of the ABA's VLSI, successful programs like VCAN and Project Salute will find additional support and funding to enable their renewal and revitalization.¹²³

V. CONCLUSION

Just like millions of their civilian neighbors, veterans have a myriad of legal needs that could benefit from legal assistance. In order to address these unmet legal needs, law schools across the country are mobilizing their students to serve the men and women who served, or are serving, our country. Law students increasingly seek out rewarding experiential learning opportunities that allow them rich opportunities for client-centered representation and interdisciplinary experiences, and veterans offer a wide range of legal issues from which law clinics can choose a particular focus. As a result of these synergies, there has been an explosion in the development of law school clinics and initiatives helping to address the unmet needs of veterans and service members. The needs of veterans and service members are also being addressed through concerted efforts of the private bar, with significant pro bono services being provided across the country through state and local bar associations and non-profit legal services providers. The American Bar Association is taking a leadership role in encouraging and organizing members of the private bar and community resource providers to improve access to justice for veterans. Providing increased access to justice for those who ensure our nation's freedom allows law students and attorneys an opportunity to demonstrably thank veterans for their service, and to remember that we all should have a cost to bear in protecting that freedom.

122. *Project Salute: Young Lawyers Serving Veterans*, ABA, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/initiatives/young_lawyers_serving_veterans.html.

123. *Initiative*, *supra* note 99.

