



MY OPINION

BY TERRY TOTTENHAM
PRESIDENT-ELECT, STATE BAR OF TEXAS

Semper Fi

For those of you who might not have had the great honor of serving in the U.S. Marine Corps, *Semper Fidelis* is Latin for "Always Faithful." I know what those words mean in Marine lingo and think about them often in the larger context.

Are we "always faithful" to those who have served in the military? According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), there were approximately 107,000 veterans homeless each night last year and approximately twice that many experienced homelessness over the course of the year. Veterans, by some counts, account for 23 percent of all homeless people in America.

In 1781, President George Washington uttered words that are still true today:

The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.

Despite the best intentions and tireless efforts of veterans groups and social services providers, too many of our service members cannot find or afford the help that they need and that they deserve. For Texas lawyers, our expertise in the law can be a lifeline. We know the difference a lawyer can make in real life issues for families, for consumers, for tenants, and for those in need of social services with nowhere else to turn.

As I have traveled the state talking about needs and programs, the idea of

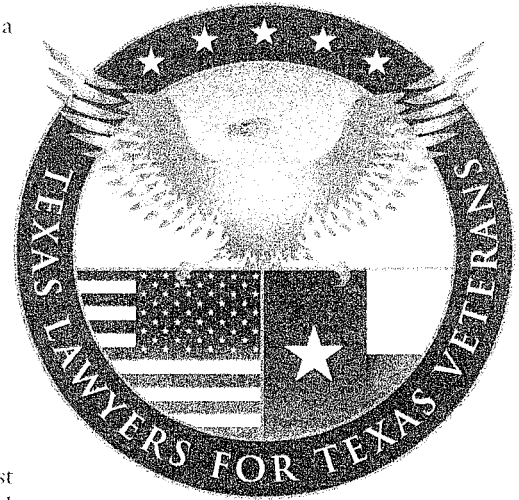
helping our veterans has struck a nerve. There is a recognizable need, and I believe a duty, to help those who have served in the military. Texas lawyers want to do our part to be faithful to the ideals of our country, our democracy, and our service men and women.

I want to invite every Texas lawyer to learn about and participate in a program that will be launched this summer to ensure that organized pro bono legal clinics exist to specifically assist military veterans who cannot afford or do not have access to basic legal services. Building on the important work of the Houston Bar Association, which offers weekly legal clinics at the VA hospital in Houston, we are expanding the program statewide. We will work with local bar associations to partner with the state's legal services providers, VA medical centers, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and the American Legion. We will reach out to mental health experts, to agencies that serve special populations, and to each of you.

In his immortal Second Inaugural Address, President Abraham Lincoln promised:

[T]o care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan.

Please join me in fulfilling Lincoln's promise for our needy men and women who have honored us by wearing the uniform.



You will hear much more about this program. One of the first things you can do is let us know of your interest (email kking@texasbar.com). I also encourage you to support and attend the May 4 gala of the Texas Access to Justice Commission which this year will benefit this project. For more information about the Champions of Justice Gala for Veterans, including sponsorship information, visit www.texasatj.org.

I am proud of my service in the Marines and I am proud to be a Texas lawyer. I look forward to serving beside you in the year to come. ☪

Semper Fi,



PROVIDING LEGAL COUNSEL TO THOSE WHO SERVED

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— George Washington

Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans is a State Bar of Texas program to develop and assist pro bono legal clinics throughout the state for military veterans who otherwise cannot afford or do not have access to the legal services they need.

The program is a major statewide initiative of State Bar of Texas President Terry Tottenham. "Our military servicemen and women have made great sacrifices in duty to their country," said Tottenham, a former Marine. "As lawyers, we have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of a great many veterans — and in the families of those who did not return."

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Mission

Develop a coordinated network of lawyers to assist veterans who otherwise could not afford counsel, working through local bar associations and veterans service providers.

History

Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans is building on the important work begun by the Houston Bar Association (HBA), which offers legal clinics at the Veterans Administration (VA) hospital in Houston. The HBA also provides training sessions for volunteer attorneys to better prepare them in handling veteran-specific matters at the legal clinics and in increasing their knowledge of benefits available to veterans through the VA.

Goals

- 1) Ensure that veterans have easy access to legal information and access to legal representation via veterans legal clinics and other resources.
- 2) Work with legal aid organizations to identify veterans seeking assistance and educate and assist local bar associations in coordinating clinics and in developing training, recruiting, and referral information.
- 3) Centralize information about legal resources for volunteer attorneys working to assist veterans.
- 4) Monitor the development and implementation of Veterans Courts and, if appropriate, support the expansion of this type of service.
- 5) Recruit, advertise, and support veterans legal services programs, including developing materials to recruit, educate, and assist volunteer attorneys and to build awareness among veterans about the clinics and other available legal resources.

For more information or to learn how you can get involved,
visit www.texasbar.com/veterans.