



Proposal for

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A University of Georgia School of  
Law Veterans Legal Services Clinic

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# Executive Summary

The University of Georgia School of Law plans to create a veterans legal services clinic to help veterans and their dependents with claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (the “VA”) and related benefits, in collaboration with UGA’s Department of Psychology or other service providers. To successfully launch a clinical program of this type, private sector resources are ideally paired with the University’s public funding.



A strong need exists for such a clinic. Many veterans return from deployment with service-related disabilities, arising from physical, psychological or neurological injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). These conditions can impair work performance; hinder relationships, and increase high-risk behaviors. It is thought these injuries contribute to high suicide rates among veterans. Despite the VA’s benefits and services, many Georgia veterans with disabilities live in poverty. Several barriers can defer or deny benefits to disabled veterans: delays in processing; restrictions on attorney participation; limitations on benefits depending on discharge status; or a lack of information.

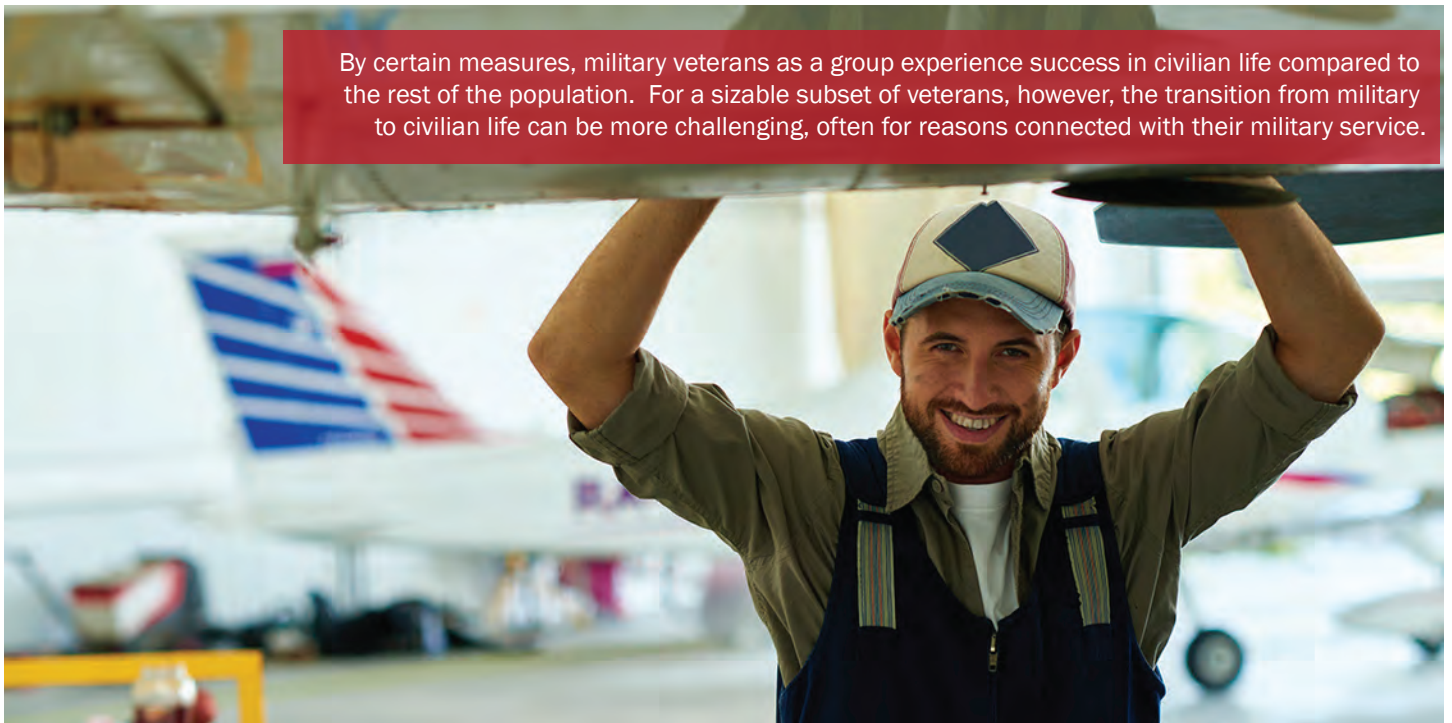
A veterans legal services clinic at Georgia Law would help veterans and their dependents overcome these barriers and reduce delays in accessing life-changing benefits and services. Veterans represented by attorneys have greater success with VA claims than those without lawyers or non-lawyer advocates. The clinic would offer law students an extraordinary educational experience. It would introduce students to an important social need, train them in administrative advocacy, teach them to collaborate with medical and psychological experts, and equip them to represent veterans in the future. The clinic also has potential for future expansion beyond a focus on VA claims: collaboration with pro bono lawyers, community education and outreach for isolated veterans.

Overall, the University of Georgia has demonstrated its commitment to veterans across its campus and programs. At the law school, participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program (a voluntary program under the Post 9/11 GI Bill) is just one example. Designed to help veterans cover costs standard GI bill funding does not cover, the VA will match privately raised funding for a veteran only scholarship. Annually up to two veterans pursuing a juris doctor a year are eligible for \$5,000 match. In addition to clinic funding, the law school is actively seeking dollars to match the VA contribution available through the Yellow Ribbon Program.

The University of Georgia and the School of Law stand ready to invest the dollars needed to support law faculty, office costs and advocacy expenses for a Veterans Legal Services Clinic. We project the outright private funding needed to create the program at approximately \$220,000 in Year 1 growing to roughly \$245,000 annually in Years 2 through 5. This does not include the Yellow Ribbon matching amount of \$10,000 annually. To secure the long term stability of the clinic, an endowed fund at the \$6.125M level would generate sufficient annual funding to support the clinic. An endowed fund to sustain the Yellow Ribbon matching effort would require an additional \$250,000 investment.

## Introduction

By certain measures, military veterans as a group experience success in civilian life compared to the rest of the population. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), veterans encounter slightly lower rates of unemployment than other citizens, earn somewhat higher incomes and are more likely to end up in management and professional occupations.<sup>1</sup> The self-discipline, teamwork and marketable skills developed through military service can carry over well into civilian pursuits.



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For a sizable subset of veterans, however, the transition from military to civilian life can be more challenging, often for reasons connected with their military service. Some veterans return from deployments with physical wounds. Others bear mental and emotional scars that may be less visible, but no less debilitating. The psychological burden carried by some of our veterans is evidenced by a 50% higher suicide rate among recent veterans than their civilian counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

This proposal envisions an Athens-based legal services clinic that would initially focus on claims for VA and other government benefits. The first section of the proposal identifies the legal needs of veterans. The second discusses how a law school clinic could help to address those needs. The third section describes the proposed clinic in detail. The closing section discusses potential future initiatives.



# Georgia Veterans and their Legal Needs

Of the nation's 22 million veterans,<sup>3</sup> approximately 752,000 live in Georgia, the ninth highest veteran population among the U.S. states.<sup>4</sup> Military force reductions following the combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan will continue to augment Georgia's veteran population in years to come. The Army has dropped from 570,000 soldiers in 2012 to 490,000 today, and plans to downsize further to 450,000 soldiers by the end of 2017.<sup>5</sup> The Marine Corps included 202,100 active duty members in 2012, but is projected to fall to 175,000 by 2017.<sup>6</sup> Since Georgia is home to a large number of military bases, many soldiers will be living in this state at the time of their transition to veteran status. Approximately 39% of Georgia veterans served during the Gulf War era and 31% served during the Vietnam conflict. Females currently make up 12% of Georgia's veteran population, but with increasing opportunities for military service by women, females represent the fastest growing demographic group within the veteran population.<sup>7</sup>



Over 48,000 veterans currently live in the 15 counties served by Community Connection, an Athens-based referral network for social service agencies. Many veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan will pass through the University of Georgia and other Athens-area colleges as they pursue educational opportunities with the help of the G.I. Bill. The available data and the experience of service providers indicate that these Georgia veterans and their dependents face important unmet needs for legal services.

## *Prevalence of Service-Related Disabilities*

The VA offers a range of benefits to veterans, but many benefits are available only to those who can establish a “service-related” disability or medical condition. Those able to demonstrate a service-related condition are entitled to tax-free compensation based on a “rating” of the degree to which the disability affects the individual.<sup>8</sup> Establishing a service-related disability can also reduce or eliminate the cost of health care services provided by the VA and allow access to other benefits like vocational training or preferences in government employment.<sup>9</sup> Even if the VA concludes that the current impact of a service-related condition is 0%, the disability finding can put the individual in a higher priority status for receiving VA healthcare, qualify the individual for future medical services when the condition worsens and open the door to other benefits like life insurance.<sup>10</sup>

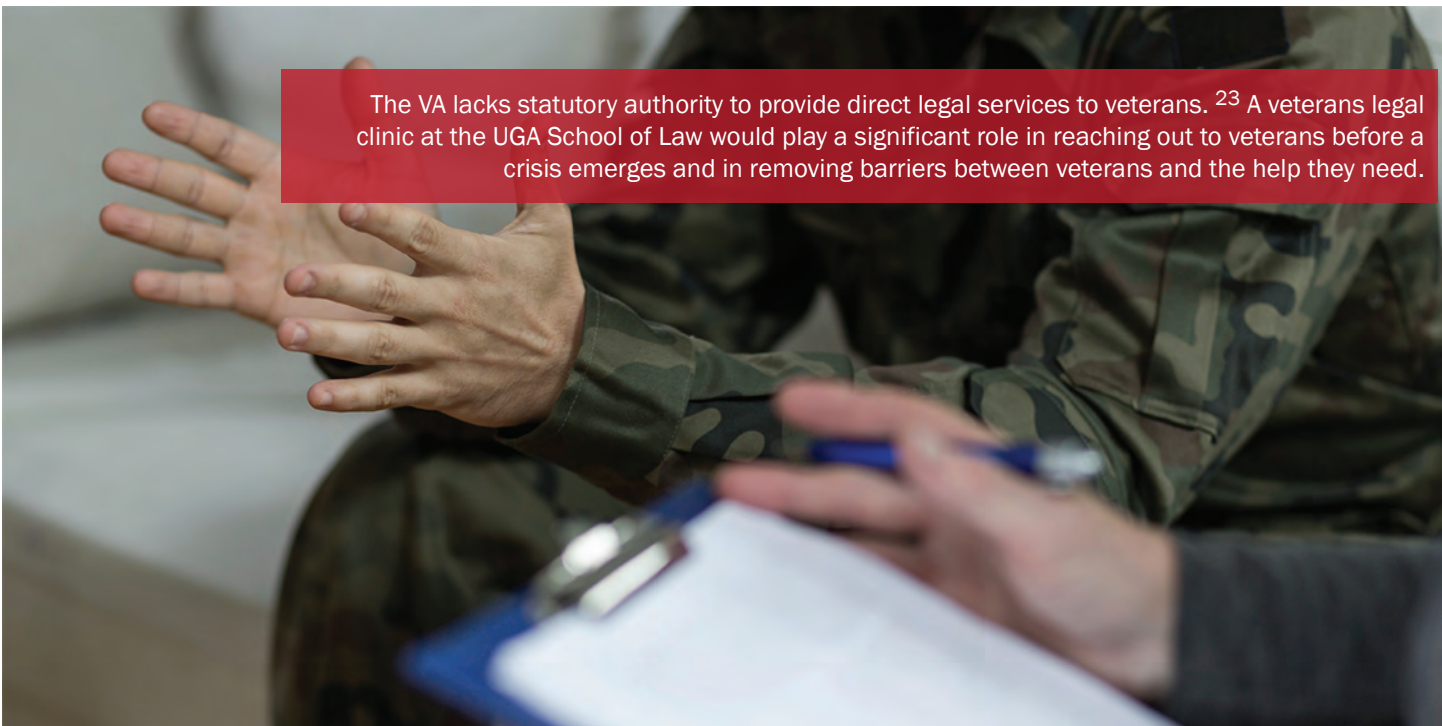
The VA reports that 154,870 Georgia veterans (~20%) currently receive disability compensation.<sup>11</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 21% of veterans who served in the Gulf War II era reported having a service-related disability.<sup>12</sup> Census data for 2013 shows that 17.5% of Georgia veterans aged 18-64 who have a disability live in poverty, compared to a 9% poverty rate for veterans without a disability.<sup>13</sup>



While many of the compensable conditions covered by the VA relate to physical wounds or medical conditions, advances in psychology have focused growing attention on mental health issues related to military service. A plurality of veterans who file VA benefit claims seek care for mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).<sup>14</sup> The leading British medical journal *Lancet* published a recent study of U.S. infantry soldiers, some of whom had deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. The authors reported that 12 percent of the soldiers screened positive for PTSD under the latest DSM guidelines, and that the number rose to 18 percent with PTSD among soldiers exposed to combat.<sup>15</sup> Another leading study of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans found 14 percent screened positive for PTSD, 14 percent exhibited major depression and 19 percent reported a probable TBI (e.g., from exposure to an IED blast) during deployment.<sup>16</sup> The toll of such conditions can be significant for the veterans and their families, impairing work performance, increasing high-risk behaviors and hindering relationships.<sup>17</sup> The effects can also be long-lasting; researchers report that between 4.5 percent and 11 percent of Vietnam veterans still experience PTSD four decades after the end of the conflict.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 22 veterans commit suicide each day.<sup>19</sup>

Significant resources have been directed in recent years to helping veterans who have experienced a crisis potentially linked with military service. The VA and nonprofit organizations have made impressive efforts to serve homeless veterans. A growing number of veteran treatment courts offer certain veterans accused of crimes an alternative to the standard criminal justice process.

There remains a large group of silent veterans, however, who could benefit from assistance offered by the VA and other agencies, but face barriers to accessing those benefits. A recent *Journal of the American Medical Association* editorial reported that half of veterans who experience PTSD do not seek treatment for the condition.<sup>20</sup>



The VA lacks statutory authority to provide direct legal services to veterans.<sup>23</sup> A veterans legal clinic at the UGA School of Law would play a significant role in reaching out to veterans before a crisis emerges and in removing barriers between veterans and the help they need.

The gap between the need for veteran services and the use of those services has several causes, including bureaucratic hurdles and delays, restrictions on attorney participation in the VA claims process, lack of information about assistance available, and personal or cultural factors.<sup>21</sup> The Center for a New American Security persuasively argues that “[p]hilanthropy and nonprofits can achieve maximum impact by acting earlier in the life cycle of veterans, long before veterans’ needs develop into crises.”<sup>22</sup> A veterans legal services clinic at Georgia Law would play a significant role in reaching out to veterans before a crisis emerges and in removing barriers between veterans and the help they need.

### *The Need for Legal Assistance Among Veterans*

The VA lacks statutory authority to provide direct legal services to veterans.<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, then, legal services rank high on lists of the unmet needs that veterans report. The VA’s 2014 CHALENG survey identified the top 10 met and the top 10 unmet needs for male and female homeless veterans. At least five of the top 10 unmet needs for homeless male veterans involved legal services, and others on the list had a legal dimension. Similarly, for female homeless veterans, four of the top 10 unmet needs clearly involved legal services, and several others might be characterized as presenting legal aspects.<sup>24</sup>

Broadening out from homeless veterans to the legal needs of Georgia veterans more generally, the best sources of information come from outreach efforts sponsored by the Georgia State Bar. The Military and Veterans Law Section of the Georgia Bar sponsors legal clinics where veterans can go for in-person, pro bono consultation with an attorney.



The Georgia Bar’s Military Legal Assistance Program (MLAP) takes inquiries from active duty service members and veterans and seeks to connect them with lawyers willing to provide free or reduced fee services.

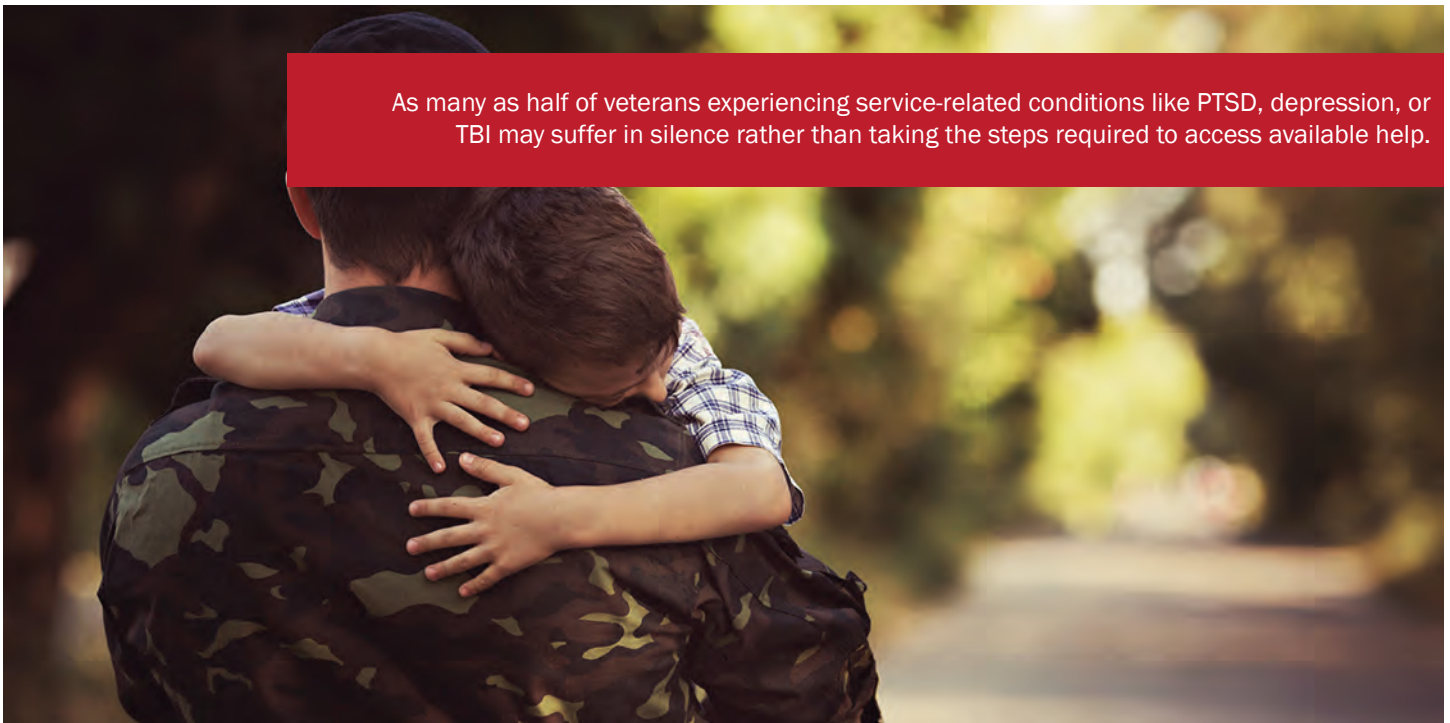


The leaders of these programs are confident that the need for legal services among Georgia veterans will far outpace any assistance our law school clinic would be able to offer. The two greatest areas of legal need relate to family law issues and veterans benefits. Of the 1,484 referrals the MLAP has processed since 2009, the top five areas of law have been (1) Family Law, (2) Veterans Benefits/Disability, (3) Consumer Law, (4) Housing/Property, and (5) Wills/Estate/Probate. Virtually every law school clinic serving veterans has included veterans benefits among the types of cases it handles, sometimes alone and sometimes in conjunction with other services. We propose that the Georgia Law clinic would initially focus on veterans benefits and related matters. See “Clinic Design” below. Future phases of the clinic might address a wider range of needs. See “Future Initiatives” below.

One indication of the volume of VA claims pursued by Georgia veterans comes from statistics maintained by Georgia’s Department of Veterans Service (DVS). As we explain below, VA regulations discourage attorney participation in the process of pursuing disability claims. As a result, veterans often turn for help to veterans service organizations (VSOs) and state veterans agencies for lay assistance and advice. The Georgia DVS report for 2014 indicates that it handled nearly 200,000 office visits and over 380,000 other forms of communication with veterans and their families. The Georgia DVS helped file 109,930 claims for compensation or pension in 2014 and helped with 10,763 notices of disagreements and appeals with respect to claims denied by the VA.<sup>25</sup> While it is good that Georgia veterans and their families have a state agency that can help provide direction in dealing with the VA, we will show below that the expertise and claim development services offered by a Georgia Law veterans legal services clinic would help to fill a gap in current services, particularly for veterans with complex claims requiring support from mental health professionals.

## *Legal Assistance for Veteran's Dependents*

The transition from military to civilian life can be difficult not just for veterans, but also for their dependents. Though military families have available a great deal of support during periods of active duty, much of this can disappear when military service ends. The Center for a New American Security notes that “[w]hile DOD systems and programs embrace the family unit, the VA is focused almost solely on the veteran himself or herself.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, there are a handful of VA programs that assist dependents of veterans. The post-9/11 G.I. bill allows veterans to transfer unused educational benefits to a spouse or child. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is available to eligible spouses, children and needy parents of veterans who die in service or from a service-related condition, along with associated medical and educational benefits. And in some cases a low-income spouse or child of a deceased veteran with wartime service may be eligible for a survivor’s pension.<sup>27</sup> The Georgia DVS helped file 7942 DIC and death pension claims in 2014.<sup>28</sup> In serving legal needs of veterans seeking access to VA and other government benefits, it will be equally helpful to the veteran to offer legal services to the veteran’s dependents.





## Addressing the Gap

A significant gap exists between the population of veterans whose lives could be improved through services and benefits offered by the VA and the use of those services. As many as half of veterans experiencing service-related conditions like PTSD, depression, or TBI may suffer in silence rather than taking the steps required to access available help. Georgia Law's legal clinic could assist veterans in overcoming a number of barriers that hinder access to VA benefits.

### *VA Delays in Processing Claims and Limits on Paid Legal Assistance*

The process of seeking VA disability benefits can be daunting and discouraging. The VA has been working for years to address a backlog in initial decisions on disability claims. The agency reports that 371,243 claims were awaiting initial decision as of October 17, 2015.<sup>29</sup> The VA Backlog Working Group, which includes Senators with oversight responsibility, reviewed 2013 data to report that the VA took an average of 337.9 days to complete work on an initial claim.<sup>30</sup>



The VA has reportedly denied 80 percent of disability claims filed by Gulf War veterans.<sup>31</sup> If the VA denies a disability claim initially, the veteran may submit a notice of disagreement and pursue an appeal. Once into the appellate process, however, the delays are often significantly longer than at the initial claim stage. The House Committee on Veterans Affairs indicates that in January of 2015 there were 289,988 appeals pending. Democratic Representative Dina Titus noted that “the average length of time to receive a decision from the Board of Veterans’ Appeals in 2013 was 1255 days”: nearly 3.5 years.<sup>32</sup> Adding the 2013 average figures for initial claim processing (337 days) and a BVA decision (1255 days) suggests that a veteran whose claim is denied by the VA may easily wait 1592 days, or over four years, from first filing the claim to an appellate decision. Even that does not end the wait for many veterans, since the most common disposition by the BVA is to remand a claim for further factual development.

Attorney involvement can increase the odds of success for a veteran pursuing a disability claim. The Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) indicates that in fiscal year 2014, when an attorney represented a veteran on appeal, the claim was allowed by the BVA in 35.3% of cases, denied in only 13.7%, and remanded in 47.8%. For unrepresented veterans, the claim was allowed in only 22% of appeals, denied in 32.8%, and remanded in 42.1%. Thus the odds of a win on appeal significantly increase when a veteran has an attorney, and the odds of a loss significantly decrease. Appeals with attorney representation also tend to be measurably more successful on average than appeals in which the veteran is represented by a veterans service organization (VSO) such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) or the Disabled American Veterans or when the veteran is represented by a state agency like the Georgia DVS.<sup>33</sup>

While attorney representation can benefit veterans pursuing a disability claim, VA regulations significantly impede involvement of lawyers in the process. To begin with, the VA will not allow an attorney to charge more than a de minimis fee for filing an initial claim. Veterans typically operate pro se when they initially apply for benefits, or receive guidance from lay advisors connected with a VSO or a state agency. When the VA has denied an initial disability claim, the veteran can hire an attorney to pursue the appeal, usually on a contingent-fee basis. However, such cases can only be handled by attorneys who have gone through a VA-sanctioned training and certification process, so the vast majority of attorneys in the United States do not have the credentials necessary to represent veterans before the VA. The economics of VA representation discourage attorneys from building a practice in this area of law. Most attorneys cannot put in significant time on VA appeals knowing that any contingent fees arising from the cases may fail to materialize for three years or more.

A Georgia Law Veterans Legal Services Clinic headed by a well-qualified attorney and staffed by law students could provide enormous help to veterans with complex disability claims at the initial claim submission stage. The VA has initiated a new “fully-developed claim” (FDC) process that could significantly shorten waiting times for veteran clients. The clinic could help the veteran identify the strongest bases for a claim, gather all the evidence necessary for support, including psychological assessments provided by the UGA Psychology Clinic or other service providers, and submit the claim and supporting documentation in a single package for expedited review. The VA Claims Backlog Working Group indicates that, in contrast to the 337.9 day figure reported for standard processing of initial VA claims, those that used the FDC process averaged 124.4 days to complete.<sup>34</sup> Initial denials of disability claims are often based on a lack of evidence supporting some element of the veteran’s claim.<sup>35</sup> Our clinic could supply the expertise veterans lack by gathering, organizing and submitting the evidence the VA will need to resolve a claim in the client’s favor. For similar reasons, the clinic could help avoid some of the delays associated with BVA appeals by dealing up front with issues that might tempt the BVA to remand for more investigation.

## *“Bad Paper” and Discharge Upgrades*

Members of the military discharged under “other than honorable” conditions are statutorily ineligible for many benefits provided by the VA.<sup>36</sup> However, a discharged soldier may be able to establish the basis for a “discharge upgrade,” raising the soldier’s discharge status to a point where necessary VA benefits can be obtained. According to the VA’s 2014 CHALENG survey, one of the top ten unmet needs of homeless male veterans is help obtaining a discharge upgrade.<sup>37</sup>

Legal services can make a significant difference in pursuing discharge upgrades. Reportedly, “[o]nly 13 percent of recent Army misconduct discharges resulted from courts-martial for serious crimes.”<sup>38</sup> The Center for a New American Security highlights an investigation at Fort Carson, Colorado that “found scores of cases for which discharges over incidents like driving while intoxicated or barracks misconduct ultimately resulted from post-traumatic stress disorder.”<sup>39</sup>

National Public Radio recently reported that “since January 2009, the Army has ‘separated’ 22,000 soldiers for ‘misconduct’ after they came back from Iraq and Afghanistan and were diagnosed with mental health problems or TBI,” depriving many of the soldiers of retirement and health care benefits available with an honorable discharge.<sup>40</sup> Where a discharge was based on bad conduct, but the underlying cause of the conduct is shown to be service-related (for example, due to PTSD), the bad conduct discharge can be upgraded. The Yale Law School Veterans Legal Services Clinic indicates that they have pursued 13 discharge upgrade cases since the clinic opened in 2010 and have prevailed in all 13, but that 8 of the cases were only won after seeking judicial review of an adverse administrative decision.<sup>41</sup> Legal assistance is critical to such a process.

## *Veterans Lack of Knowledge or Desire to Seek Assistance*

Some veterans do not seek VA and related benefits because they do not know of available services appropriate for their needs.<sup>42</sup> Others will not take the initiative to seek help, but might be persuaded to do so through the encouragement of friends and family. One element of the clinical experience for students at the UGA veterans legal services clinic would be outreach activities designed to inform veterans and their loved ones of the legal assistance offered by our clinic and other ways they might get help accessing appropriate services.

Recent veterans attending the law school will be a useful source of insight into potentially effective methods of outreach. One veteran on our committee suggested, for instance, that law students could make presentations or prepare literature for distribution during training sessions provided to outgoing members of the military as they make the transition to civilian life. Speaking to organizations like the VFW and the American Legion would be another possibility. By such means, the clinic could perform an educational function, getting information into the hands of those who could put it to good use.



## Clinic Design



The University of Georgia School of Law proposes to create clinic focused on specific legal needs of veterans and their dependents. The in-house clinic we propose would help veterans and their dependents with VA and related benefits in a fifteen-county region, in collaboration with UGA's Department of Psychology or other service providers. Below are details on the: type of clinic, clients to be served, relevant legal issues, geographical area, and primary sources of collaboration. The next section sketches potential future phases for the clinic. This proposal has been guided by three principal goals:

- Serve veterans and their dependents on issues for which no readily available service exists in our community, in tandem with other social, medical, and psychological services.
- Offer legal services that enhance the dignity, autonomy and stability of each represented client, and help them to enjoy productive lives in their communities.
- Offer a clinical experience that enhances students' abilities as lawyers and increases their understanding of veterans concerns and their ability to collaborate with other disciplines.
- Demonstrate the University's commitment to veteran's seeking to educate themselves as effective advocates by participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program.

### *Type of Clinical Program*

We propose the creation of an in-house clinical course as the initial veterans legal services clinic. This would be a law school course, and would require the employment of one or more faculty hosting up to 8 students per faculty member. Students would work between 10 and 20 hour per week and would attend a two hour weekly seminar.

The Georgia Law Veterans Legal Services Clinic would focus on a range of benefits issues relevant to veterans and their dependents. (See below) Such a law practice would offer students core lawyering experiences: client interviewing, case screening, case development, legal research, practice-oriented writing, client counseling, oral and written advocacy, and negotiation skills. Students would also have the opportunity to prepare a factual record, to develop medical evidence for clients, to advocate formally and informally before administrative agencies, and to interact with other professionals in delivering services. The practice will involve significant outreach to veterans and their families in a fifteen county region, offering students experience with community education and introducing students to support networks in both small towns and rural areas.

The weekly seminar would focus on the law and policy arising out of the nation's efforts to support veterans and their dependents. It would include focused education on the law and process necessary to the clinic's cases, as well as training in the range of lawyering skills that the cases will require.

Students will learn the doctrinal, policy, social, and political realities associated with the veteran's experience. The seminar also offers opportunities for guest speakers and other similar events that can enhance the student's overall learning.

### *Clients Served*

The Georgia Law Veterans Legal Services Clinic will serve veterans and their dependents. We propose to represent veterans rather than active duty personnel on the understanding that, on average, veterans are more likely to face legal needs that they cannot meet through readily available resources. We also propose to represent dependents on the assumption that the families of veterans will have distinctive needs and problems and will be no better able to find legal assistance for those needs than will the veteran. Service to a veteran's family members will, in many instances, be as helpful as would service to the veteran individually.

The clinic will select cases with the goal of helping veterans facing particular challenges. Cases will be selected based on both the type of legal matter (see below) and the characteristics of the client. This proposal does not seek to specify with precision the exact screening criteria the clinic will use. Rather, we propose that clinic faculty and students implement criteria that would allow the exercise of judgment about which clients to serve, using a wide range of factors. These might include:

- Veterans disconnected from other services, i.e. "silent veterans" who may lack knowledge of or access to services;
- Veterans facing special barriers to claiming and maintaining benefits, i.e. "vulnerable veterans" including homeless, mentally ill, or elderly veterans;
- Low-income veterans, most likely determined by reference to the federal poverty guidelines.

## *Benefits from the Veterans Administration and from Other Sources*

We propose that the clinic initially handle only specific legal issues arising out of claims for VA and other public benefits based on disability. In general, these would be for VA compensation and medical benefits. Decisions about which cases to take will have to balance the number of clients we can serve against the need to restrict intake so students can learn in an environment that will provide high quality service to existing clients.

We suggest that the clinic should narrow its focus to a realistic range of cases, including the following:

- **“Complex” Claims:** involving appeals to the Board of Veterans Appeals or the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. By complex claims, we mean claims which require legally skilled advocacy or sophisticated medical or psychological evidence which a veteran cannot obtain through other sources of assistance.
- **Fully Developed Claims:** the clinic could help veterans take advantage of the new “fully developed claim” process which permits a more rapid final decision.
- **Discharge Upgrades:** the clinic could help veterans for whom an upgrade in the type of discharge might lead to eligibility for VA benefits that were previously unavailable.
- **Related Public Benefits:** the clinic could help veterans who also have claims for income from the Social Security Administration and for medical benefits through both Medicare and Medicaid.
- **Dependents Benefits:** the clinic could help the children and other dependents of veterans with their own claims, potentially including income, health care, and education benefits from the VA.

Many if not all of these kinds of claims can take months and in some cases years to resolve. Accordingly, we would not expect students to handle a single case from beginning to end. Rather, we anticipate that clinic students would handle several different kinds of cases over the course of a semester, encountering a diversity of practice challenges and advocating in several different phases of the administrative process.

This kind of practice will create several specific types of costs. Practice in front of the Board of Veterans Appeals will impose travel costs on students and faculty. Development of claims for the fully developed claims process and for appeals will benefit from psychological evaluations provided by the Department of Psychology or other service providers. Consultations with other medical providers may also sometimes be necessary.



## *Geographic Region*

The clinic would target cases for clients residing within a fifteen county-region, including Athens, an area co-extensive with the region served by Athens-based Community Connection (Banks, Barrow, Clarke, Elbert, Franklin, Greene, Hart, Jackson, Madison, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Stephens, Walton). This region includes the small city of Athens, several smaller towns, and several predominantly rural areas. It would stretch towards but not reach the large counties to the immediate north and east Atlanta. It would also include counties to the north, east, and south of Athens, towards Augusta and the South Carolina border.

Serving a largely rural area creates both opportunities and costs. It offers the significant likelihood of reaching “silent” veterans and “vulnerable” veterans. Community outreach and community education would become important focuses of the clinic within this service area. Transportation to and for clients would also be an important concern.

## *Collaborative Services*

In the process of performing our needs assessment, we identified a wide range of prospective collaborating organizations with which the clinic might connect in performing its services. Within the University of Georgia, we see two schools as having the most significant potential as collaborators. The University of Georgia Department of Psychology has indicated an interest in a collaboration between its Psychology Clinic and the Georgia Law Veterans Legal Services Clinic, in two distinct ways. First, the Psychology Clinic could serve as a key source of the psychological evaluations necessary for the establishment of certain benefit claims. Second, the Department of Psychology might serve as a point of referral for clients seeking mental health counseling. The faculty at the Department of Psychology have indicated a strong interest in forming such a collaboration and have identified the Director of the Psychology Clinic as the contact person for that initiative.

The University of Georgia School of Social Work also presents the potential for collaboration. For instance, social work students could serve in the law school clinic and the two schools might collaborate on cross-training between the law clinic seminar and courses at the School of Social Work.

Finally, we have entered into discussions with a wide range of services with which the Veterans Clinic could establish cross-referring relationships, including many of the following:

- The Athens Clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including medical, psychological, and community outreach providers.
- The field office of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, located in the same facility as the Athens VA Clinic.

- The Georgia Department of Labor.
- The Student Veterans Resource Center at the University of Georgia.
- The Veterans Court program located in the Western Judicial Circuit Superior Court.
- The Military Legal Assistance Program of the Georgia State Bar Association.
- The Judge Advocate General Corps offices at the various Georgia military bases.
- The Veterans Justice Outreach coordinator for homeless veterans from the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta.
- Private non-profit veterans service organizations, including the Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other organizations.

## Future Initiatives

The clinic model described above would meet important needs and embodies an achievable set of goals for the initial iteration of the clinic. At the same time, however, we recognize the enormity of the legal needs faced by veterans. We therefore discussed several other potential initiatives that might, at a later date, become part of the clinic. We list those initiatives here to provide perspective on our initial choices and a sense of potential areas of growth in the future.

**– Pro Bono Referral / Externship Opportunities:** the Georgia Bar’s Military Legal Assistance Program has successfully implemented a pro bono referral program in which Georgia lawyers agree to take cases on referral from the project or to participate in monthly clinic days at which they meet, counsel, and potentially accept veterans for representation. These attorneys accept a wide range of case types, including divorce and family law, consumer law, housing and shelter, and other civil concerns. The UGA Veterans Clinic could set up a similar relationship with attorneys in its service area.

**– Community Education and Pro Se Resource Creation:** during the needs assessment, we identified a significant need for community education and for the creation of pro se resources that would assist veterans with a wide variety of legal and practical issues. Law students could deliver presentations throughout the Clinic’s service area, and could staff a “quick advice” clinic either in person or by phone or videoconferencing software. Finally, under faculty supervision, students could create forms and instruction sheets that would assist veterans with legal concerns that might include simple small claims litigation and standard transactional tasks.

**– Wraparound or Holistic Services:** during the needs assessment, we identified a substantial interest in providing services within the clinic that covered needs that go beyond purely legal services, an approach sometimes referred to as wraparound or holistic service. To provide such a service, students and faculty from other schools at the University might work within the clinic to provide other kinds of help, including social work or psychological counseling, financial planning, or nutritional guidance. Other clinics and courses at the Law School already participate in cross-disciplinary partnerships; this approach represents an extension of that existing practice.



## Gratitude

The collaborative effort of many, both in and outside the Georgia Law community, has made the planning for an innovative approach to supporting our nation's veterans possible. We wish to extend our sincere thanks to the members of the Advisory Committee listed in the appendix. In addition, members of the law school staff and faculty served alongside current law students, Jack Gibson and Marcus Griffin (themselves veterans), to craft this proposal. Lead by law professor Randy Beck, this Advisory Committee involved members of the law faculty including Russell Gabriel, Alex Scherr and Matt Hall. Members of the staff, including Lisa Mathis and Lara Pulliam, were indispensable to this effort. Finally, Georgia Law Board of Visitors member Pete Robinson made himself and the very talented staff at Troutman Sanders LLP available to help finalize these materials.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs, Profile of Veterans: 2013 (July 2015); US Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Employment 2000 to 2013 (Dec. 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> Alan Zarembo, Detailed Study Confirms High Suicide Rate Among Recent Veterans, LOS ANGELES TIMES (Jan. 14, 2015) (study of military personnel on active duty between 2001-07 found “an annual suicide rate of 29.5 per 100,000 veterans, or roughly 50% higher than the rate among other civilians with similar demographic characteristics”).
- <sup>3</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, Statistics at a Glance (Aug. 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Veteran Population, [http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran\\_Population.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp) (visited October 20, 2015).
- <sup>5</sup> Lydia DePillis, The Biggest and Most Disruptive Layoffs in America are Coming from the Military, Washington Post (July 7, 2015).
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, Index of Military Strength, Heritage Foundation (2015). The Air Force has shrunk from 330,000 in 2014 to under 313,000, though it is trying to rehire a few airmen. One Year After Force Cuts, the Air Force Needs to Grow Again, Air Force Times (May 18, 2015).
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