

# VETERAN LEGAL CLINIC

KEEPING OUR PROMISE, HONORING THEIR SERVICE



Service to our veterans is deeply engrained in the history of Syracuse University. With one of the country's largest military bases, Ft. Drum, right up the road, a reserve unit from every military branch in Onondaga County, and the Syracuse VA Medical Center directly next-door, Syracuse Law is uniquely positioned to establish New York State's first comprehensive Veterans Legal Clinic.

## A NEED FOR FREE VETERAN LEGAL SERVICES

There are approximately 21.5 million veterans living in the United States. As the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down, there will be a tremendous growth in our veteran population unlike anything we have seen in decades. When service members are on active and reserve duty they can turn to the Judge Advocate General Corps for legal services. However, this service is not available to warriors once they separate from the military. Transitioning from the military back to civilian life is one of the most drastic transformations a person can make. As warriors acclimate back to civilian life, there are a range of legal issues they may encounter. Unfortunately, there is no civilian counterpart to the JAG corps to provide veterans the legal services they require to make this transition.

There is a true lack of free legal services for our veterans. An unprecedented number of veterans are now returning home with serious and debilitating injuries, and many are not receiving the full VA benefits that they have earned. Many veterans simply do not have the necessary information and training to navigate the highly complex and bureaucratic VA claims process.

Numerous studies have noted this lack of comprehensive legal services for our veterans. In particular, veterans in rural areas, like many in Upstate NY, do not have access to the same services and resources that veterans near large cities or military bases do. Federal law currently prohibits attorneys from accepting compensation for representing a veteran prior to the appeals process. Additionally, many veteran specific legal problems are not covered by existing legal aid organizations. Furthermore, many veterans do not meet the threshold requirements for free assistance on non-veteran specific issues, further limiting access to representation. Veterans assisted by attorneys on average receive more compensation for their service-connected injuries and illnesses. The lack of access to legal services has already prevented thousands of veterans from receiving the benefits they have earned and inhibited their transition back to civilian life. This problem will only grow as the veteran population continues to increase in the coming years.

## VETERAN LEGAL ISSUES

- In 2013, 55 veterans died each day before receiving their VA benefits.
- Nearly 700,000 veteran disability claims are backlogged.
- Injured veterans can wait close to two years for disability compensation.
- In 2012, the average length of time between filing an appeal of a VA claim and the rendering of a decision was a stunning 1,040 days.
- A congressional report found legal issues as a leading cause of veteran homelessness and suicide.
- Less than 500 of the nation's 1,225,452 attorneys practice veterans law.

## BENEFITS TO OUR VETERANS AND COMMUNITY

### 1. Assist with VA Claims

Veterans can receive the benefits they earned in as few as 21 days as opposed to a 2 year wait.

### 2. Represent Veterans in VA Claim Appeals

Veterans represented by an attorney had their appeals allowed or remanded 82-90 percent of the time.

### 3. Help Veterans Upgrade Discharges

Without attorney representation, veterans have a less than 20 percent chance of an upgrade to an honorable discharge.

### 4. Give Priority Status in Existing Clinics

Including: Family Law, Bankruptcy, Criminal Defense, Disability Law, Elder Law, Tax Law and Consumer Law

## TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF VETERAN ADVOCATES

As hundreds of thousands of our heroes return home from Iraq and Afghanistan there are currently not enough attorneys with veterans' law experience to meet their legal needs. Students who participate in the VLC will acquire the skills to serve our veterans throughout their careers.

## BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

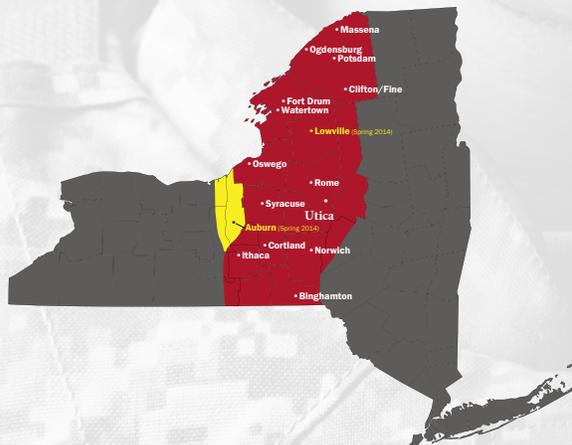
- Experiential Learning
- Understanding of Military Culture
- Interaction with Government Agencies
- Representing Real Clients
- Develop Case Management Skills
- Improve Advocacy Skills
- Instill the Value of Pro Bono Service

## CENTRAL NEW YORK'S VETERANS LEGAL CLINIC

Injured veterans have increased mobility issues and transportation needs. Syracuse Law has partnered with the Disabled American Veterans organization to provide free legal services to a large portion of Central NY including the Ft. Drum/Watertown area which has one of the highest percentages of veterans in the country. The DAV's 31 vans will pick up veterans from their homes, bring them to their legal appointments at the College of Law and return them, free of charge.

### Area of Coverage

Auburn	Massena
Binghamton	Norwich
Cortland	Ogdensburg
Clifton/Fine	Oswego
Ft. Drum	Potsdam
Herkimer	Rome
Ithaca	Syracuse
Little Falls	Utica
Lowville	Watertown



Our warriors have given so much to secure our freedom. They are true heroes. Now, as they come home with terrible injuries and complications they need heroes of their own here at home to help them to transition back to civilian life. They need Homefront Heroes.

Those who make a contribution to the VLC and join the Homefront Heroes will receive recognition on the VLC's "Wall of Heroes," receive a plaque to commemorate their contribution, be prominently placed in our promotional materials and identified at our media events.

### Levels of Giving

Clinic Namesake	Contact Us
★★★★★	\$50,000
★★★★	\$30,000
★★★	\$20,000
★	\$10,000
	Other Contributions

### To Become A Homefront Hero

#### Contact:

#### Office of Advancement

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