

MBA NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Sept. 27, 2007

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MASSACHUSETTS BAR ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE LEGAL AID TO VETERANS

BOSTON, Mass. — Free training provided jointly by the Massachusetts Bar Association and U.S. Trust will make it possible for attorneys to offer their complimentary services to veterans, who are struggling to navigate the legal system in the areas of benefits, housing, employment and medical care.

Attorneys can use the skills they learn at today's training to help veterans in several ways, including offering free representation – known as pro bono in the legal community – in appealing benefits at the state and federal levels. Next month, veterans will be able to call in their legal concerns or questions to volunteer lawyers staffing phones for a special veterans MBA Dial-A-Lawyer program. Later this fall, the MBA will kick off a visiting lawyer program that will send attorneys to city and town veterans service offices for the day.

“I do think that veterans are generally neglected. We acknowledge Veterans Day, we acknowledge Memorial Day, but I think most Americans rely on the Veterans Administration and military to take care of the veterans,” said MBA President-elect Edward W. McIntyre, a Vietnam War veteran.

“As the leading voice for the legal community in Massachusetts, we have a special role and responsibility to serve our community. Serving our veterans with legal services - that are so necessary to their quality of life - provides a meaningful opportunity for our members who are eager to give back to those who have served our country with such honor,” MBA Executive Director Marilyn J. Wellington said. “We are grateful for the generous support of U.S. Trust Bank of America Private Wealth Management in ensuring the success of this important endeavor.”

This new program comes on the heels of a report released today by the Government Accountability Office that reveals almost half of wounded service members do not get the service they need once they return because medical units are short staffed and the average veterans must endure a 177-day delay before receiving disability payments.

A report by the Institute for Defense Analysis also concluded that veteran benefits are inequitable, often varying by state, and a study by the Pentagon found nearly half of all National Guard members report physiological conditions after returning home.

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The first step in this initiative is a free daylong training, sponsored by the MBA and U.S. Trust Bank of America Private Wealth Management, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sept. 27 at the MBA offices at 20 West Street. Ronald B. Abrams, joint executive director, and Louis J. George, staff attorney, of the National Veterans Legal Services Program in Washington, D.C., will lead the training, “Serving Our Veterans in the Law: Pro Bono Training for Attorneys.” Lawrence Feeney, general counsel to the Massachusetts Department of Veterans’ Services, will also be on hand.

“This is really a step forward. These guys – and gals – can’t afford to pay and they need the help. Right now, the help doesn’t exist. It would be very difficult to find pro bono services for veterans. Overall across the state the services are just not there,” Feeney said. “This could be a huge help in getting veterans’ lives in order. We’re really excited about it.”

Abrams and George will outline legal issues faces by veterans and explain the process of appealing benefits at both the state and federal level. Abrams has conducted more than 100 training sessions across the country including several for state bar associations and the American Bar Association.

“The National Veterans Legal Services Program applauds attorneys who will provide pro bono services to the heroes who gave defended our freedom and who are today suffering from illness or injury as a result of their service,” said Abrams, who also sits on the executive board of the Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program in Washington, D.C. “NVLSP will do all it can to support these volunteer attorneys who are helping those who put their lives at risk for their country.”

McIntyre said he presented the idea to the MBA after being approached by members from across the state suggesting that veterans be the focus of pro bono initiatives. McIntyre served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade from 1968 to 1971, spending more than a year in Vietnam.

“Historically, Americans have looked toward the legal profession to set what’s wrong right,” McIntyre said. “And we can do that again in this case, with veterans.”

Incorporated in 1911, the Massachusetts Bar Association is a non-profit organization that serves the legal profession and the public by promoting the administration of justice, legal education, professional excellence and respect for the law. The MBA represents a diverse group of attorneys, judges and legal professionals across the commonwealth.