

**NEW LAWYERS SERVING WARRIORS™ PROGRAM HELPS IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN VETERANS
GET BENEFITS AND HEALTHCARE THEY DESERVE**

***NVLSP Advocates say free legal services for wounded and discharged veterans
will help those returning from war with PTSD and other injuries***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON – Legal eagles are descending into the emerging healthcare crisis over how injured and disabled veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are treated through a new program called Lawyers Serving Warriors™.

Organized by the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP), Lawyers Serving Warriors™ offers free legal help to active duty personnel who served in Iraq or Afghanistan and are facing administrative separation, or going through a mental or physical evaluation board. They also help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have received an inappropriate discharge or disability rating, or are having difficulty with a claim with the VA for disability compensation, or a claim for Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance benefits.

With several cases already under way, Lawyers Serving Warriors™ is planning to amplify its efforts over the next year and expects to assign hundreds of cases to attorneys from high-dollar law firms wanting to help for free.

Attorneys wanting to participate in the project will attend a satellite broadcast training in 15 locations around the country today to learn the ins and outs of the military disability and discharge system, and how to work with their active duty and veteran clients, many of whom are suffering from mental health injuries and in dire need of better healthcare than a strained and antiquated VA can provide.

The VA takes an average of 177 days to decide a benefits claim. But if the claim is initially denied and the veteran appeals, it can take years to resolve the appeal. Meanwhile, the veteran waits, without benefits. In February 2008, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported about 392,000 claims were pending before the VA.

“Lawyers Serving Warriors™ is designed to ensure that our nation keeps its pact to care for its active duty personnel and veterans when they are injured and disabled due to their military service in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF),” said Bart Stichman, co-executive director of NVLSP. “A wounded service member being evaluated through a mental or physical evaluation board will be well-served by having an attorney at his or her side who can advocate for healthcare and monetary benefits.”

In several cases, noted Stichman, he has been contacted by OEF/OIF veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who have been administratively separated from the military, instead of being treated for PTSD. This means they receive no military disability benefits, and no military healthcare for the rest of their lives. “In effect, these veterans are being kicked to the curb and abandoned by the country they swore an oath to protect and defend. That is unconscionable and unacceptable,” said Stichman.

One in five veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD or major depression, according to a study by the RAND Corporation announced in April 2008. With 20 percent of our returning military service members affected, that amounts to 300,000 people needing help, yet only a little more than half have sought treatment.

OIF and OEF veterans seeking help from Lawyers Serving Warriors™ are urged to visit the website at www.lawyerservingwarriors.com and submit information through the “Request Free Legal Help” button on the left side of the screen.

More information is available at www.lawyerservingwarriors.com

ABOUT NVLSP

The National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) is an independent, nonprofit veterans service organization that has been serving active duty personnel and veterans since 1980. NVLSP strives to ensure our nation honors its commitment to our 25 million veterans and active duty personnel by providing them the federal benefits they have earned through their service to our country. NVLSP offers training for attorneys and other advocates, connects veterans and active duty personnel with pro-bono legal help, publishes the nation’s definitive guide on veteran’s benefits, and represents and litigates for veterans and their families before the VA, military discharge review agencies, and federal courts. For more information go to www.nvlsp.org.

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