Serving the Legal Needs of Those Who Have Served

Veterans Day

November 2013

By Terry O. Tottenham

As the nation observes Veterans Day, we pause to honor the brave men and women who valiantly have served our country protecting our rights and sacrificing so much to protect our freedoms. All too often, returning veterans face financial hardships that make protection of their rights and access to our justice system difficult for them and their families.

Over the past four years, Texas lawyers have contributed countless pro bono hours and more than $1.4 million to assist in providing legal services for veterans – in a state with one of the largest veteran populations. Lawyers have come to the aid of veterans who are wrongly denied critical medical care, disability and other benefits, or need help with family matters arising from deployments. And sometimes, lawyers have saved veterans from being on the streets.

The Texas Access to Justice Foundation, the largest state-based funding source for legal aid, recently awarded more than [$426,000 in grants](http://www.teajf.org/news/releases/Veterans-Grants-2013.aspx) to 11 Texas legal aid providers to help provide civil legal services for low-income veterans. An estimated 6,700 veterans received legal aid from grantees of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation last year.  Money raised by lawyers and corporations at an annual gala sponsored by the Texas Access to Justice Commission contribute significantly to these efforts.

In addition to monetary donations, Texas lawyers – through the Texas Lawyers for Veterans Program coordinated by the State Bar of Texas – have donated thousands of hours in pro bono assistance at clinics held throughout the state. More than 10,000 disadvanted veterans have received help through this program since its inception.

As lawyers, we have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of a great many veterans — and in the families of soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who did not return. As a former Marine, I’m proud of the work of my fellow lawyers in serving the legal needs of veterans.

Thank you, Veterans.

*Terry O. Tottenham, is a former State Bar of Texas president and founder of Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans, and is currently serving on the board of directors of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation. Tottenham is of counsel to Norton Rose Fulbright.*