



ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
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January 22, 2014

Deborah O'Regan, Esq.
Executive Director
Alaska Bar Association
840 K Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: Formation of Service Members, Veterans & Military Families Section

Dear Ms. O'Regan:

I am writing to request the formation of a new section of the Alaska Bar Association. The proposed new section is one that focuses on the legal issues faced by service members, veterans and military families.

There are several good reasons to establish a section devoted to this population and its legal needs. First, Alaska has a large population of service members, veterans and military family members. In fact, Alaska has the highest number of veterans per capita in the country.¹ In addition, there are approximately 26,000 total service members and 50,000 family members currently in Alaska.²

Second, veterans, service members and military families face unique laws and legal issues. The Service Members Civil Relief Act, Uniformed Services Former Spouses Protection Act, and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act are but a few examples of these laws. This population also deals with complex bureaucracies, such as the VA benefits system, in which only a handful of Alaska attorneys specialize. Alaska Natives and American Indians living in Alaska face complex issues related to the intersection of the VA and IHS healthcare systems, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare is limited. On the criminal side, the Alaska Veterans Court in Anchorage provides a legal system focused on reducing the recidivism rate of veteran offenders.

¹ 2012 U.S. Census Data.

² This includes U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps personnel, Coast Guard, Guardsmen and Reservists. ALCOM, Department of Defense (<http://www.jber.af.mil/alcom/index.asp>); Coast Guard (<http://www.uscg.mil/publicaffairs/statedatasheets/ALASKA.pdf>).

Third, there are non-legal issues faced by this population that are significantly intertwined with their legal matters. Post-traumatic stress disorder is one such issue. PTSD can arise in a variety of legal contexts including domestic relations, employment and healthcare. In addition, veterans are overrepresented in the homeless population³ and many of the issues preventing them from being stably housed are specifically legal in nature.⁴ Raising awareness of these issues among lawyers and legal services providers is essential to providing competent and holistic representation of these individuals.

Fourth and finally, both the legal community and the military community will benefit from the formation of this section. Holding regular meetings, CLEs and other events will raise the Bar's awareness of the legal issues faced by the military and veteran communities. Raising awareness and understanding of these issues will hopefully lead to an increased number of attorneys that are willing and able to represent Alaska's veterans, service members and their families.

Below is a list of nine members of the Alaska Bar that are interested in the formation of this section:

Rhonda Butterfield, Esq.
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³ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs: http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Center/Prevalence_Final.pdf

⁴ 2011 CHALENG Report at p. 12:

http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/chaleng/2011_CHALENG_Report_FINAL.pdf

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Thank you for submitting this letter to the Board of Governors for the January 2014 meeting. If you or the Board of Governors would like any additional information, please feel free to contact me at 222-4503 or mhummm@alsc-law.org

Very truly yours,

ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maggie Humm", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Maggie Humm
Supervising Attorney

Cc: (Members listed herein)