



Office of Katherine S. Broderick, Dean

June 15, 2015

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
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It was a great pleasure to see you and discuss the Law School's plan to expand our clinical capacity to begin to serve veterans. We recently secured a gift from a major donor that will pay fifty percent of the cost of a clinical fellow to concentrate on veterans issues. You graciously agreed to assist us in raising funds for the other half. We need to raise \$31,000 to match the gift we have already received.

Following our conversation, we consulted with programs that serve veterans in the District and veterans across the country. We also assessed the most effective use of this resource in the current structure. Based on this review, we have decided to hire a clinical fellow who will work with students to represent women veterans in family law matters including custody disputes, child support and domestic violence.

There are more than two million woman veterans in the United States. In coming years, that number will grow. Twenty percent of currently active duty personnel are women and 16 percent of Gulf War veterans are woman. The advocacy group Disabled American Veterans documented the ways in which a veterans system primarily designed to serve men, is placing women veterans at risk in its report "Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home," <http://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf>.

The issues that women veterans experience overlap, but are often different than those of men who have served. Women can experience the consequences of combat differently, including PTSD and women soldiers experience a shockingly high level of sexual assault from fellow soldiers. In 2012, the Department of Defense published a report that more than 3,600 women soldiers reported being sexually assaulted. The military acknowledges that this is a mere fraction of the assaults that occurred. The prevalence of sexual assault, especially by those with whom you pledge mutual protection, compounds the psychological damage that women experience when they serve.

Women veterans can also have more complex family issues. Women are more commonly the primary caretakers of their children before they are deployed than men and much more commonly part of a non-traditional or blended family. They will frequently make informal arrangements for the care of their children during deployment, often without the assistance of counsel. Upon returning, legal disputes ensue over custody. The Department of Labor has statutory responsibility to assist veterans with reentry into the work force. During listening sessions conducted by DOL with homeless women veterans, child custody was identified as a significant concern. Legal services

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programs in the District and elsewhere have seen cases of woman returning from Iraq only to have to fight with a relative for the return of their child.

Women veterans may also face difficulty in securing financial support for their children, especially if the father is also in the military. There is a complex interplay between local and federal law that must be navigated as well as issues with securing wage garnishments, tax refund capture or other strategies to ensure that child support payment is made. Without the assistance of a lawyer, successfully securing support might be impossible.

Finally, women veterans are often victims of domestic violence. One study found that 24 percent of women veterans under the age of 50 had experienced domestic violence in the previous year and 90 percent had been sexually harassed while in service. Too few services for domestic violence exist in the District and none specifically target women who have served in the military.

Women veterans who present with a family law matter, may also have a benefits problem. The veterans' benefits system is complex and there is a large backlog of appeals. While there is an unmet need in this area, unlike family law, there are several District of Columbia-based programs to link veterans with attorneys who can assist them on benefits issues. We will partner closely with these providers to ensure that any benefits issues are addressed.

The Law School's General Practice Clinic is led by an experienced family law practitioner who can support the clinical fellow. As we develop greater expertise in providing services to the veterans' community, we will reassess whether to expand this work or add to this capacity.

Thank you for your consistent and generous support and all you have done and continue to do to help UDC Law's students to serve those most in need. We look forward to continuing to work together as partners in closing the justice gap and in reducing inequality and injustice for women veterans.

Warmest regards,

Sincerely,



Shelley Broderick