

Giving Back to Our Veterans

During my career as a lawyer, I have always practiced in areas where a large percentage of the population was active military. I started off in Abilene right next to Dyess Air Force Base, and now I practice in Waco, which is down the road from Fort Hood and home to a large Veterans Affairs hospital. Having a working knowledge of how military duty affects criminal and civil litigation is a must for practitioners living in these and other military areas. Yet, it certainly doesn't come naturally.

The unsuspecting family litigator doesn't usually deal with issues related to the Survivor Benefit Plan or the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act on a day-to-day basis. Likewise, the novice

criminal attorney may have no idea how a plea in civilian court may affect the retirement status of an active service member or—more complex still—a noncitizen service member attempting to obtain citizenship through military duty. These are complicated issues that require self-directed study, experienced guidance, and proper resources for attorneys who decide to take on cases for service members.

The Texas Young Lawyers Association has a long history of supporting military members and their families, including hosting thousands of veterans legal clinics across the state through local affiliates. Now we are taking that longstanding dedication

one step further by providing the necessary resources to any lawyer willing to serve those who serve us. We want to provide service members with strong legal advocacy and prevent errant information from being given by a lawyer not familiar with the unique caveats of these cases.

To accomplish this, longtime TYLA Director and Vice President Baili Rhodes is leading a team embarking on a multistate effort to produce a training program and informational pamphlet about military divorces that will be distributed at bases across the country. The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association has agreed to work with us as our first partner. Together, we will create a universal program applicable to all states in the country and concerning federal statutes related to litigation with service members. Afterward, TYLA will create a Texas-specific chapter while GYLA prepares its own. We hope the project will expand to include all states and different legal areas, such as criminal law, collections, and more.

Our service members do everything they can every day to ensure they are prepared, well qualified, and ready to fight on our behalf. We should do the same for them. If you would like to help with this project or have extensive experience with litigation involving members of the military, please email me at barrett@blanchardthomas.com.



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