



OUR NATION'S PROMISE

*A Newsletter Dedicated to the Legal Issues Facing
Veterans and Their Families*

June 2013

Service Women's Action Network Names Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement Service Provider of the Year

Washington D.C.

During an April, 2013 *Truth and Justice Summit on Military Sexual Trauma*, the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) honored Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement (CVA) as the Service Provider of the Year.

SWAN honored the CVA for the outstanding legal services it provides to veterans and service members. "I am so profoundly honored to accept the Service Provider of the Year Award on behalf of Public Counsel's CVA," said CVA Director Rick Little as he accepted the award. Little went on to say, "To receive such an honor from SWAN, the national leader in securing equal opportunities for female veterans, further developing policies to ensure that female veterans enjoy freedom from discrimination, harassment, or assault, is one of the highlights of my career. The CVA is grateful to SWAN for acknowledging its work."



The summit boasted national press coverage with appearances made by Senators Jeanne Shaheen, Claire McCaskill, Kirsten Gillibrand, Representative Loretta Sanchez, and actress Jennifer Beals.

- **Rick Little**, Director, Center for Veterans Advancement at Public Counsel



Helping An Iraq War Veteran Overcome Obstacles to Employment

By Ali Salimi, pro bono partner

Irvine-based criminal defense attorney, principal of www.DSMSD.com (read: Dismissed), and Center for Veterans Advancement ("CVA") volunteer, M. Ali Salimi, recently advocated on behalf of a young Iraq War veteran who was buried under a proverbial mountain of infractions, misdemeanors, and arrest warrants caused by temporary homelessness and unemployment.

The veteran was placed with Mr. Salimi's office through the CVA-LACBA Veterans Pro Bono Project, which assists low income veterans resolve a variety of legal matters, including outstanding traffic tickets and warrants. The veteran immediately received a full interview and comprehensive phone consultation to permit the veteran to ask questions and provide a narrative for how his violations occurred. With outstanding arrest warrants and a suspended license, there were no job prospects available for this otherwise deserving veteran and anxiety was omnipresent with fines totaling in the thousands of dollars.

With nearly ten violations in three different courthouses in two counties, Mr. Salimi arranged appearances in each courthouse, submitted motions to quash the outstanding arrest warrants, and lifted the veteran's drivers license suspension all in a matter of days. Whereas the future was bleak, there was now hope as the young veteran could legally drive and no longer had any outstanding arrest warrants.

In the next few weeks, Mr. Salimi appeared on the underlying matters at the Metropolitan and Newport Beach Courthouses to dismiss the charges where possible and negotiate a reduction in fines where dismissal was not possible. Mr. Salimi was able to finally meet with his pro bono client after he received favorable dispositions on the underlying charges and violations. Mr. Salimi will appear on the veteran's remaining matter at the Torrance Courthouse in July and will attempt to obtain a favorable outcome there as well. The two continue to keep in contact.

*"It was high counsel
that I once heard given to a young person,
"Always do what you are afraid to do."*

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

It was freezing cold and most of Ben's toes had turned black as he hunkered down with his buddy Don. Both men kept firing back as they endured the constant barrage of enemy fire, on occasion ducking exploding trees and tracers. As they refocused their sights on the advancing enemy, a flash suddenly enveloped them.

Days later Ben woke in a military hospital only to learn that an enemy round had decimated his location and had decapitated Don. Ben was filled with enemy shrapnel and suffered from a serious head injury and frostbite. The blast was so great that medics had recovered Ben from a tree nearly 40 feet from his foxhole.

After Ben's discharge from the Army, he continued to endure the pain caused by combat in Vietnam. However, when his injuries made it nearly impossible for him to walk, and his cognitive abilities began to wane considerably, Ben filed a claim for compensation with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sadly, while waiting for his claim to be completed, Ben died.

Not to be discouraged, Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement "CVA" continued the matter on behalf of Ben's spouse. After **13 years** of denials, appeals, and court pleadings, the CVA was successful in winning over **\$230,000 in monetary benefits** for Ben's widow, Laura.

"Ben's dad told him to always face his fears and to never run," said Laura. "Ben never gave up! I guess that is what made him such a great soldier and an even greater American. You are just like Ben (referring to the CVA). Thank you for not turning away after Ben died."



CVA-LACBA Veterans Pro Bono Project Helps Veterans Remove Legal Barriers to Employment and Housing

Join us and help America's veterans rebuild their lives

The Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA), the largest metropolitan private bar association in the United States, and Public Counsel's nationally acclaimed Center for Veterans Advancement have joined forces to help "uphold our nation's promise to veterans and their families" and to stem the tide of poverty among our nation's veterans and their families.

LACBA will work with the CVA to recruit and train *pro bono* attorneys to provide free legal assistance and representation to Veterans on a range of legal matters, including family law, and ticket and warrant matters, which can become major obstacles to employment or housing stability. This joint partnership will assist veterans throughout Los Angeles County.

If you are interested in providing *pro bono* legal assistance to low-income veterans, please contact Ely Grinvald, Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellow at (310) 478-3711 x 41163, or LACBA Pro Bono Coordinator, Laurie Aronoff at (213) 833-6776.

Other Opportunities to Serve

Pro bono attorneys are always welcome!

These veterans need your help now. Opportunities are open to all attorneys who are members of the California bar.

KH, a Vietnam-era, honorably discharged veteran, needs help with his Los Angeles County ticket matters. While trying to cope with his substance abuse, KH received three quality of life tickets, one for fare evasion, and the others for infractions he cannot recall. KH's driver's license is currently suspended due to his failure to appear on these tickets. LH is seeking treatment for his addiction and is applying for VA disability benefits. The CVA has a training video and overview manual available on handling traffic tickets. The process is similar for quality of life tickets.

RE is a homeless veteran, who is also seeking treatment for substance abuse. In 2009, RE sold his vehicle to a third party. In 2010 and 2012 RE allegedly received traffic tickets at the Metropolitan courthouse, but he did not own or possess his car at the time. RE seeks assistance with resolving the traffic tickets, as he cannot afford the fines due.

KR served honorably in the United States Navy from 2005 to 2010. KR is currently homeless and lives at the Salvation Army's residential treatment facility. In August, 2010, after KR was discharged from service, she surrendered her car to her leasing company. A letter from the secured creditor dated August 31, 2010, confirms that the car was then in the creditor's possession. In May, 2012, KR received a letter from a collection agency, claiming that she owed \$250 for a Washington, D.C. speeding ticket she allegedly received in December, 2011. KR did not possess the car in December, 2011, did not recognize the license plate, and was in Texas, where she did not drive. In addition, the ticket was issued by a red light camera and was mailed to KR as the registered owner of the car. KR would greatly appreciate *pro bono* counsel assistance with this ticket matter as she almost certainly did not receive this ticket and should not have to pay it.

If you are interested in helping these veterans, please contact Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellow Ely Grinvald at:(310) 478-3711 x 41163 or egrinvald@publiccounsel.org.
