

# The Gilmer Mirror

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## Veterans fight for our freedom: it's time we fight for their legal aid

*By Texas Supreme Court Justice Nathan L. Hecht  
and Dean Donald J. Guter*

Texas is home to the second-largest veteran population in the country, with more than 1.5 million veterans in the Lone Star State.

The transition from military life to civilian life is difficult. In addition to the emotional and physical battles facing veterans upon their return, numerous legal challenges often make the transition even more challenging. Landlord/tenant disputes, credit problems, family law matters, veterans benefits, restoring a driver's license: these are all common civil legal issues that can become overwhelming for veterans.

Providing free legal services to qualifying veterans is imperative. We should make a commitment to better the lives of the service men and women who voluntarily risked their lives for our freedom. Texas lawyers and the legal community have a responsibility to help military service members. Legal aid can and does make a difference for veterans.

Each year, legal aid organizations provide free services to more than 8,500 Texas veterans. In addition, many private attorneys volunteer their time and expertise through pro bono programs that provide assistance to clients at no charge.

For example, the South Texas College of Law Houston Veterans Clinic opened in spring 2015 to serve low-income veterans facing service-related legal issues. Funding from the Texas Access to Justice Foundation provided a staff attorney to help run the clinic and teach law students applicable law as they work on veteran cases. Many of these law students are themselves veterans. In addition to this ongoing work, the law school also hosts free clinics each year, providing legal aid consulting or representation to more than 100 veterans in Brazoria, Fort Bend, Harris and Montgomery counties.

This week (Nov. 11-17) is Texas Veterans Legal Aid Week (TVLAW). Across the state, local bar associations, legal aid organizations, and law schools are hosting free legal clinics to help veterans access the justice system and get the help they need.

If you are a veteran in need of legal assistance, please visit <https://texaslawhelp.org/tvlaw-2018> to find a TVLAW clinic in your area, or call the statewide hotline at 1-800-622-2520.

These efforts are part of the larger initiative in Texas to support the men and women in uniform who took an oath to defend our country. We owe it to them to defend their rights.

This past year, the Texas Access to Justice Foundation provided \$1.87 million in grants to 14 nonprofit organizations that provide free legal services to veterans.

The Joe Jamail Endowment for Veteran Legal Services, created by Houston attorney Richard Mithoff, launched last year to provide a funding source for Texas veterans to have access to legal services. Since its inception, the endowment has raised more than \$800,000. These funds will go a long way towards securing the free legal services our veterans truly need. If you would like to learn more or honor a service member or veteran in your life, please visit [teajf.org](http://teajf.org).

The commitment to veterans must continue. We owe them more than gratitude and applause—we owe them our promise that what they have sacrificed for us will not be overlooked. One way to honor their service is to step up and help veterans receive the legal assistance they deserve.

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