Thank you for volunteering at the Veterans Legal Clinic organized by the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans. We are providing needed services to an under-represented population living in poverty who has served our country honorably. This project would not be possible without generous volunteers like you.

The brief services clinic we will offer on December 9th (9am-3pm) is the latest in an ongoing effort we hope will be continued both in the Twin Cities and statewide. Your feedback on our training, clinic operation, and follow-up services is greatly appreciated and I hope you will work with us to make this an effective and efficient service for Minnesota’s veterans.

Clinic Details

Tuesday, December 9th, 9am to 3pm*

*Intake finished at 2pm

Law students: please arrive by 8:10am

Veteran’s Administration Building – Flag Atrium

VA Medical Center
One Veterans Drive
Minneapolis, MN 55417

http://maps.google.com/places/us/minneapolis/veterans-dr/1/-va-medical-center-minneapolis-mn

Dress code is business casual.

PARKING IS LIMITED AT THE VA HOSPITAL DUE TO CONSTRUCTION. IF POSSIBLE, PLEASE PARK AT THE FORT SNELLING PARK AND RIDE. THE PARK AND RIDE LOT IS LOCATED JUST SOUTH OF THE HOSPITAL ON HWY. 55 (SEE BLUE ARROW ON MAP).

Enter the hospital through the visitor’s entrance, which is the entrance on the left when looking SE towards the front of the hospital from the parking lot. The flag atrium is on the second floor overlooking the open space where the information desk is located just inside the hospital. Please ask at the information desk if you need help locating the clinic. We are restricted from posting flyers in the hospital but will do what we can to clearly mark the clinic location inside of the medical center.
Contact Sara Sommarstrom at 612-367-6786 (cell) if you are not able to attend, have problems finding us, or have questions on the day of the clinic.

**Services Provided**

We are prepared to advise pro se litigants on a variety of legal issues, both civil and criminal. It is our hope to provide services as broadly as possible while maintaining quality control—many issues can be addressed by assisting the litigant with brief legal or factual research, which can be done on-site by volunteers. Experienced volunteer attorneys provide direction to law student volunteers, who will assist litigants with legal forms and understanding procedural requirements. The student volunteers can also assist with tasks such as document gathering and/or organization, drafting, and making out-of-state inquiries over the phone. All student volunteers will have training on the basics of filling out pro se forms and working with pro se litigants. All state court pro se forms are available at [www.mncourts.gov/forms](http://www.mncourts.gov/forms) along with instructions on proper procedures for service, filing, and administrative or court appearances.

County Child Support offices are assisting in this effort by providing detailed information on current child support orders for litigants who have Minnesota cases or Minnesota is enforcing an out-of-state order. Representatives from Child Support will be at the clinic to access current order information and assist in navigating the child support system. Child Support Officers are not allowed to give legal advice to litigants regarding their cases but will be extremely helpful in identifying the complexities of multiple orders and jurisdictional concerns. The child support component of the clinic is organized as part of the ABA-VA-HHS Child Support Initiative and the Twin Cities are one of a dozen pilot sites nationwide developing partnerships to help homeless veterans become in compliance with child support orders.

One of the largest barriers to the justice system is the maze of procedural requirements that pro se litigants must navigate in order to initiate and complete an action in civil court. Our hope is that by pairing up case managers and volunteers with veterans we can ease these difficulties by providing post-clinic assistance with filing and service of process. To that end, one of the screening mechanisms we utilize identifies homeless veterans without homeless provider support services—case management provides supportive services that can identify housing and benefits resources as well as help maintain compliance with court procedures and orders. A social worker from the VA will be at the clinic to do intake with qualifying veterans. County Veteran Support Officers will also be on-site at the clinic—the primary role of the CVSO is to provide assistance to veterans navigating legal and administrative processes relating to veterans’ benefits, housing, and other basic needs. MACV program staff is also involved in helping veterans find follow-up assistance and in directing veterans to the clinics—outreach is performed in homeless shelters and transitional housing programs to identify veterans who will benefit from the legal assistance provided at our clinics.

Follow-up services are integral to the success of pro se litigants. Every veteran who enters the clinic is given a folder with MACV materials and a follow up sheet with contact information for the Vetlaw program. Many issues that arise at the legal clinics are inappropriate for pro se litigants; when possible, clinic staff finds legal services or pro bono full representation assistance for veterans. This may be due
to the type of case or capabilities of the litigant—if at any time you question a litigant’s ability to
proceed with the issue at hand, please notify clinic staff (Sara Sommarstrom or Nathaniel Saltz) and we
will find support services for the veteran. Volunteer attorneys are welcome to assist the veterans
outside of the clinic but will not be covered by the clinic’s malpractice insurance and will need to put the
representation agreement in writing, as per the clinic’s client acknowledgement release. Attorneys
wishing to provide follow-up services on a sliding scale or limited scope basis should talk to Vetlaw
Director Sara Sommarstrom before taking on the case of a veteran initially encountered at a MACV legal
clinic. We are supportive of attorneys willing to help on a low-bono basis but need to ensure that the
veteran understands the distinction between services received free at a clinic and provided by a private
attorney on a low-bono basis.

Below is a flow chart to illustrate our desired service model during the legal clinic:

Volunteer Roles for Non-Attorneys

- Child Support Consult (MN cases only)
- Crim. Exp. Screening (MN only)
- SSDI Screening
- Homeless Provider consult
Non-attorney volunteers will assist with intake and client flow, observe attorney consultations when possible, and fill out legal forms for veterans. Volunteers should be prepared to act in any of the roles as we will be moving volunteers amongst the positions based on need. The clinic is a chaotic environment and we strive to serve every veteran with the utmost respect for them as individuals. It is likely that your duties will shift throughout the day—we will need almost all volunteers on intake at the beginning of the day and as the need for intake is reduced more volunteers will assist with case-specific research or legal forms. If at any time you are unsure of what to do, just check in at Command Central!

Intake workers will go through a short intake form with the litigant to gather some basic personal information and an overview of what the veteran hopes to accomplish with the clinic’s help. The volunteer should write out the form for the veteran to ensure that it is complete and the attorneys have the information available to advise the veteran. Once intake is complete, the litigant will be processed through the clinic based on their substantive issue and need for any additional non-legal services. All clients will be signed up for the Attorney Wait List by the intake worker, with those clients experiencing homelessness also added to the Homeless Providers List. Both the Attorney Wait List and Homeless Providers List will be at Command Central.

A couple of volunteers will be assigned to assist the attorneys and child support officer with locating documentation and legal forms. Volunteers may also be assigned to internet research to assist in providing legal information to litigants or identifying the necessary procedure in cases outside of Minnesota. Directions for some of the most common searches will be available in the computer area but volunteers should feel comfortable asking the staff at Command Central if they have questions.

The remaining volunteers will be in the court forms workshop portion of the clinic, assisting veterans in filling out pro se legal forms based on the attorney’s advice. In addition to walking the veteran through the forms, the volunteers will explain service of process and other procedural requirements. Volunteers are not allowed to give legal advice so we will have one attorney assigned to the forms workshop to supervise the legal work and answer brief advice questions.

All volunteers are invited to assist a veteran post-clinic in filing and service of process. This will entail meeting the veteran after the clinic to file initial fee waiver paperwork, complete service of process, and file their legal action. Oftentimes lack of knowledge about the legal system and confidence in one’s ability to proceed pro se prevent litigants from following through on their legal matters. Our hope is that by providing post-clinic assistance, the veterans we serve will be more likely to obtain their desired outcome. Post-clinic work will be supervised by Sara Sommarstrom or a volunteer attorney.

**Volunteer Attorneys**

This clinic series’ success is dependent on the strength of our volunteer attorneys. We strive to recruit a diverse base of attorney volunteers in all areas of law. The most common legal issues we see at the clinic are in family law and criminal law, but we often see questions related to disability and health care benefits appeals, housing, criminal expungement, employment law, bankruptcy and credit issues, and personal injury. We strive to provide brief advice and brief services in as many areas of the law as possible, but in no case should attorneys provide information or advice outside of his or her area(s) of
expertise. Web-based resources like ProJusticeMN.org and LawHelpMN.org, the court websites, and Westlaw or Lexis are helpful in finding information on a large variety of topics and attorneys are encouraged to assign law students a research task when they deem it appropriate to assist the veteran.

Attorneys should check in at the Command Center (middle of the room) when they arrive. You will be led to a table in the attorney area and given a few minutes to settle in before your first client. After clients complete intake they will be signed up for the attorney wait list and assigned to the first available attorney that has relevant expertise. A volunteer will call the client’s name and bring them to you with the intake sheet. After completing the consultation (no more than 30 minutes if possible), please walk the client back to the Command Center table for next steps. The veteran will have a “Follow Up Instructions“ sheet in his/her folder that you can use to describe the next steps or tasks in the process. If there are any research, forms, or drafting tasks we can assign a law student to start them at the clinic if the appropriate materials are available. Let the Command Center staff know if you are ready for your next client immediately or need a short break. You may be asked to review completed paperwork for clients you advised between consultations if there are no other attorneys available. Please check in with the Command Center before you leave so we are aware of your departure.

Attorneys without malpractice insurance will be covered by MACV’s malpractice insurance. The coverage does not extend to a representation relationship outside of the clinic setting. MACV has recently been included in the CLE for Pro Bono program, which means that attorneys volunteering at our clinics can log up to six hours of CLE credits per reporting cycle (6 hours of pro bono equals one hour of CLE credit). Questions related to extended representation relationships, CLE credits, and insurance should be directed to Sara Sommarstrom (ssommarstrom@mac-v.org).