



**VETERANS
LEGAL INSTITUTE**

2024

★
★
★ **ANNUAL
IMPACT
REPORT**

A DECADE OF IMPACT

www.VetsLegal.org

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,



As I reflect on the past ten years of service at Veterans Legal Institute (VLI), I am deeply proud of the collaboration between our staff, stakeholders, volunteers, board members, and the greater community. Together, we have chosen to take a stand against veteran homelessness and suicide, honoring those who raised their right hand and signed a blank check so we can live in peace and enjoy our freedoms.

These numbers represent lives changed, families strengthened, and communities uplifted. Yet behind each number is a story—a story of resilience, sacrifice, and hope.

Take the story of *Mark, a three-time deployed Marine Corps veteran who found himself battling invisible wounds from two harrowing deployments to Fallujah. Mark returned home struggling with PTSD and the immense weight of his experiences but, like many veterans, was hesitant to ask for help. When he finally sought support, he was met with a system that left him feeling invalidated—his benefits denied, his service seemingly discounted. Mark felt abandoned.

That's when he found VLI. Mark shared his story with us, and we immediately stepped in to fight alongside him. Our team prepared and submitted a thorough brief, advocating on his behalf, and represented him at his hearing. After a long battle, Mark's paperwork was corrected, and he was finally able to receive the benefits he earned through his years of sacrifice and service.

Today, Mark enjoys the stability those benefits provide and continues to serve his community by volunteering for families of those killed in action. His journey is a testament to resilience and a powerful reminder of why the work we do matters—because every veteran deserves to feel valued and supported.

Despite these successes, the fight is far from over. Every month, we receive close to 400 applications for service. Each call represents a veteran or family in crisis—a father facing eviction, a mother seeking healthcare, or a retiree struggling to access earned benefits. Our team is inundated with requests, but we are unwavering in our commitment to provide help and hope.

To continue this mission, we need your support. Whether by sharing our story, serving as an ambassador for VLI, or contributing your time, talent, or treasure—you play a crucial role in ensuring no hero is left behind. Together, we can provide the lifeline so many veterans and their families desperately need.

From all of us at VLI, thank you for being part of this incredible journey. Your dedication fuels our efforts, uplifts our heroes, and reminds us why this mission is worth every ounce of energy.

Warm regards,

Antoinette Naddour, Esq., LLM
Executive Director & Co-Founder



WHO WE ARE



Veterans Legal Institute provides pro bono assistance to homeless, at-risk, disabled, and low-income veterans to eradicate barriers to housing, healthcare, education, employment, and to foster self-sufficiency.

VLI Board of Directors

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Mary Beth Steen, CFRE (*Military Family Member*)
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Bobby McDonald - Chair Emeritus (*Navy Veteran*)
Richard Oberreiter (*Navy Veteran, Present Member of the California State Guard*)
Matt Rabin, Esq.
Sean S. Twomey, Esq.

VLI's Core Values

• Outreach • Compassion • Quality • Leadership • Empowerment



A Decade of Impact

In just its first decade, VLI has transformed from a passionate group of advocates into a powerful and enduring force for justice within the veteran community. The dedicated VLI team has touched the lives of thousands of veterans across Southern California, providing them with pro bono legal services and fiercely fighting for those who fought for us. Through their tireless efforts, VLI has secured millions of dollars in rightfully owed benefits to veterans, and worked to ensure that our heroes don't end up on the streets.

This remarkable impact would not have been possible without the invaluable support of countless volunteers—who have selflessly donated their time over the years to amplify the mission to serve our nation's heroes.

While it's hard to fully capture the profound difference VLI has made, the 10-year impact below offers a glimpse of the tangible and lasting impact we've had in the community over the past ten years.

10 Year Impact

- Total Veterans Served: **12,232+**
- Volunteer Hours: **100,000+**
- Veteran Benefits Recovered: **\$9,000,000+**
- Female Veterans Served: **1,949**
- Disabled Veterans Served: **4,564**
- Elderly Veterans Served: **5,031**
- Client Average Income: **~\$1,884/month**
- Veterans with Minor Children Served: **3,140**





Legislative Victories

Veterans Legal Institute (VLI) takes great pride in partnering with government leaders to shape and implement policies that enhance the lives of veterans and their families across the state of California.

SB 498: A Critical Step for Disabled Veterans' Legal Rights

One key legislative victory was the passage of SB 498, that addressed a significant barrier for disabled veterans in accessing legal aid. Prior to the passing of this legislation, many veterans were disqualified from receiving legal aid due to their disability compensation, which pushed them into a "Catch-22" situation—too "rich" to qualify for legal aid but too poor to afford private attorneys. VLI partnered with Senator Tom Umberg to push for SB 498, which allows disabled veterans to access the legal services they desperately need, without being penalized for their disability compensation. This legislation expanded the pool of eligible individuals, ensuring that more disabled veterans can now receive the legal assistance necessary to navigate complex legal matters. As a result, disabled, service-connected veterans statewide are significantly more likely to qualify for and access legal aid at IOLTA-funded organizations improving their overall quality of life.

SB 1182: Ensuring Veterans Receive Comprehensive Family Court Assistance

VLI played a crucial role in developing SB 1182, codified as Family Code 211.5, legislation that aims to provide holistic support for veterans involved in family court proceedings. Family court can be particularly difficult for veterans, especially those living with PTSD or traumatic brain injuries. VLI worked with Senator Susan Eggman to pass SB 1182, that connects veterans in family court with local resources, including mental health services, housing, legal assistance, and more.

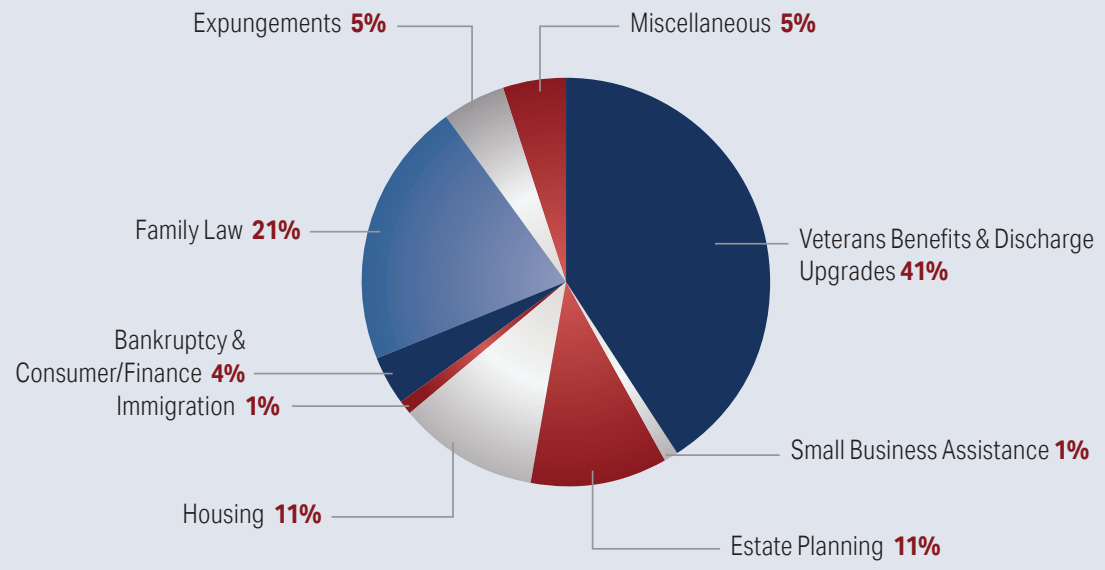
In 2024, VLI was instrumental in the successful implementation of this legislation at the Orange County Lamoreaux Justice Center, where on-site peer support services now directly connect veterans and their families with essential resources. This program is presently fully funded, and offers comprehensive support that includes legal assistance, housing and job placement services, case management, food security, and other supportive services. Every veteran is directly routed to VLI's family law clinic and receives a pro bono consultation with an attorney specializing in family law, ensuring that no veteran is left to face family court proceedings alone.

Through these legislative victories, VLI continues to make a profound impact on the lives of disabled veterans and their families, ensuring they have the legal support, and resources they need to thrive in their personal and legal journeys.



Statistics

- Total veterans served: **1,766**
- Total cases: **1,988**
- Number of mobile legal clinics set up at veteran hot spots: **166**
- Total volunteer hours: **10,000+**
- Cases served by pro bono attorneys: **~700**
- Average of **200-400** applications per month
- Clients served in over **250+** California cities including those in rural areas
- Community partnerships: **25+**
- Monetary benefits:
 - Compensation awarded: **\$3,160,345**
 - Debt waived: **\$480,746**





Client Demographics

- Disabled: 43%
- People of color: 62%
- Seniors: 43%
- Women: 13% (women represent 16% of total military force currently)
- Veterans with dependent children: 31%
- 64% live on \$2500 or less per month

Client Breakdown by Branch of Military Service

- Army: 41%
- Marine Corps: 29%
- Navy: 20%
- Air Force: 8%
- Coast Guard: 2%

Client Breakdown by Period of Service

- WWII: 1%
- Korean War: 1%
- Vietnam War: 26%
- Gulf War: 14%
- War on Terror/Post 9/11: 58%



Veteran Benefits and Discharge Upgrades

Veterans aren't automatically guaranteed essential benefits such as disability compensation, GI Bill educational funding, or VA-provided healthcare. At VLI, our attorneys are dedicated to fighting for veterans' right to access the benefits they rightfully deserve.

2024 Metrics

- **Percentage of successful benefit claims: 92%**
- Veteran benefits awarded: **\$3,019,557.92**
- Total active cases: 808
- Clinics held: 45
- VLI attorneys also mentor volunteer attorneys and law students in this specialized practice area, expanding the reach and impact of VLI's work.



A Decade of Impact: 4,200+ cases opened

Highlight - The Wadeck-Hyman Veterans Legal Aid Clinic: This clinic provides onsite legal services at the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center in Long Beach, California. This is where we met Doug, a Navy veteran being treated for two cancers that weren't service connected until he started working with VLI. Doug now receives full compensation for his illnesses, with special monthly compensation, while receiving full healthcare at the VA Hospital.

Family Law

Military service often brings added challenges to family dynamics, from the emotional toll of deployments to the life-altering effects of service-related injuries such as PTSD and TBI. With the support of our dedicated pro bono attorney community, VLI helps countless families navigate the family court process, and our primary objective is always to keep parents and children together.

2024 Metrics

- Total active cases: 407
- Clinics held: 12
- 17 attorneys regularly volunteered at this clinic
- Total family law clinic appointments: 200+

A Decade of Impact: 2,400+ cases opened

Success Story: An Army veteran and devoted grandfather came to VLI in the wake of an unimaginable tragedy—the sudden passing of his adult daughter. Struggling with grief, this veteran found himself facing another heart-wrenching challenge—his young granddaughter, who had lost her mother, needed a place to call home. With her biological father absent from her life, the little girl longed for the stability and love her grandfather could provide. Determined to help, VLI called upon a compassionate volunteer family law attorney who took his case pro bono. Through their tireless efforts, they secured guardianship for the veteran, allowing him to step into the role his granddaughter so desperately needed. Now, this loving grandfather is able to offer his granddaughter a roof over her head and a safe and stable home filled with love, care, and the promise of a brighter future.





Housing

Many veterans face eviction or landlord-tenant disputes, which are made more complex by service-related injuries or economic hardships. At VLI, our attorneys are committed to protecting veterans and their families from unjust evictions and housing instability so they can stay safely housed, focus on healing, employment, and rebuild their lives.

2024 Metrics

- Total active cases: 215
- Prevented evictions for 26 individuals and families

A Decade of Impact: 1,700+ cases opened

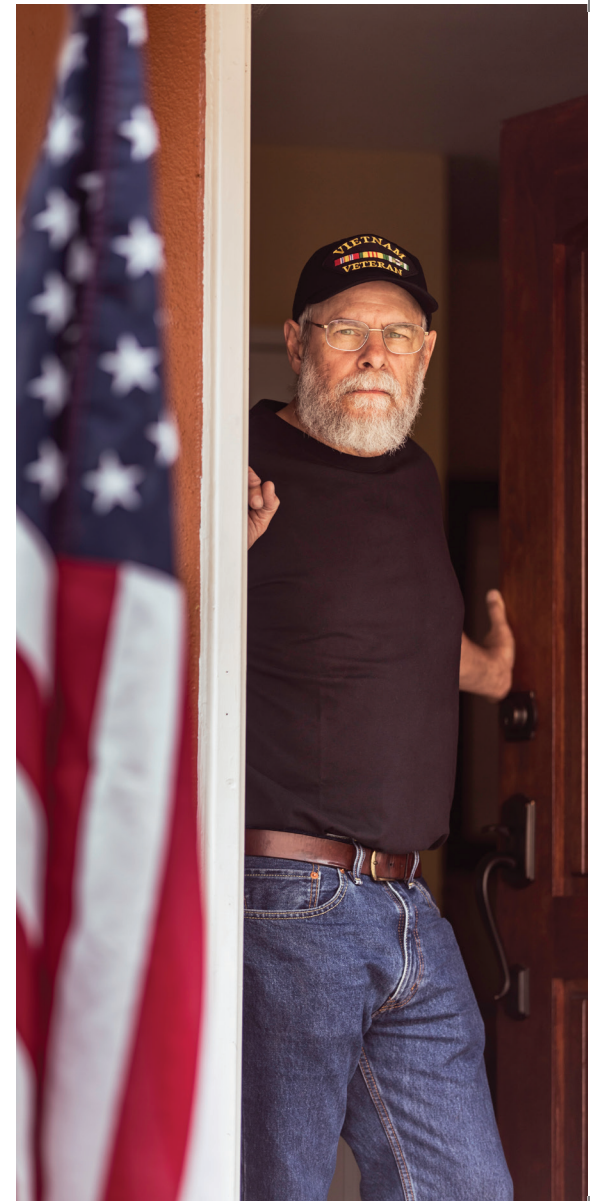
Highlight: Partnership with Volunteers of America

For over a decade, VLI has proudly partnered with Volunteers of America Los Angeles to support veterans overcome legal issues leading to homelessness. This powerful partnership blends VOA's social services and funding with the power of legal services at VLI creating an impact of hundreds of veteran families avoiding homelessness throughout the years.



Volunteers of America®

Success Story: An active duty servicemember, deployed overseas, faced an eviction at home and needed legal representation. VLI stepped in to protect his rights under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) and obtained a stay of court proceedings, protecting the veteran and his family from eviction, while the veteran was overseas. Ultimately, the plaintiff agreed to dismiss the case, keeping the veteran's family safely housed.





Other Legal Practice Areas

VLI is committed to combating financial instability in the veteran community. Through thoughtful estate planning and effective consumer defense, we help ensure lasting impact for veterans, their families and generations to come.

2024 Metrics

- Total active cases: 558
 - Estate Planning: 223
 - Bankruptcy and Consumer/Finance: 83
 - Immigration: 30
 - Expungements: 104
 - Small business assistance: 16
 - Miscellaneous: 102
- Clinics held: 20

A Decade of Impact: 4,000+ cases opened in Estate Planning, Bankruptcy and Consumer/Finance, Immigration, Expungements, Small Business Assistance, and Miscellaneous.

Success Story: In 2024, VLI hosted 12 monthly estate planning clinics, providing veteran clients with comprehensive trust and estate packages at no cost. These clinics were made possible through the dedicated efforts of our VLI staff, as well as our board member Sheila-Marie Finkelstein, a private practice trust and estate attorney, whose expertise ensured the highest level of care and support for those who served our country.





SPONSOR A HERO

\$5,000

Provides onsite and online free legal clinics at a local VA Hospital. These clinics serve close to 60 low income and homeless veterans who have medical issues monthly.

\$2,500

Covers the average cost of preparing a comprehensive estate plan for a veteran in California. Your donation will help grow generational wealth for veteran families by ensuring they receive critical trust and estate planning services.

\$1,000

Supports sustaining the healthcare and standard of living of veterans through attorney appeals. These appeals secure benefits claims for illnesses and injuries including, but not limited to, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and other visible and invisible wounds of war.

\$500

Ensures the connection of veterans with other nonprofits to meet their holistic needs aside from legal services.



YOUR CONTRIBUTION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Lasting Impact: Become a recurring monthly donor at www.vetslegal.org or text "VLI" to 44-321.

VLI is on Venmo and Paypal!
Use the QR codes below to make your donation.

Donate via Venmo



Donate via PayPal



Thank You to our 2024 Major Funders

Andersen Foundation
Bank of America Charitable Foundation
Bigglesworth Family Foundation
Bob Woodruff Foundation
CalVet (California Department of Veterans Affairs)
Child Guidance Center
Coastline Community College
Hoag Hospital Foundation
Judicate West Foundation
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State Bar of California
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
U.S.VETS
Volunteers of America
Wright Ford Young & Co.

***Thank you to every funder and individual donor
who make our work possible.***

THANK YOU





WAYS TO SERVE AT VETERANS LEGAL INSTITUTE

- Take a case pro bono.
- Volunteer in-house or at one of VLI's clinics.
- Apply to join the board.
- Join VLI's Annual Fundraising Event Committee.

WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE

- Become a monthly donor.
- Recommend VLI through your Donor Advised Fund.
- Include VLI in your legacy estate planning.

Learn more at www.vetslegal.org



"Thank you for the incredible dedication and hard work you put into my VA disability claim. From the very beginning, you made it clear that you believed in my case and were willing to fight for me every step of the way. Your unwavering commitment and persistence truly made all the difference. There were times when the process felt overwhelming, but you never gave up on me. You navigated this very cumbersome process and made sure that no stone was left unturned. Your ability to keep me informed, explain every step in a way I could understand, and always be available for my questions gave me confidence and peace of mind during an otherwise difficult journey. Your compassion and dedication went beyond just being my attorney... you became a true advocate for me. I cannot thank you enough for your patience, guidance, and tireless effort in working to get my disability claim approved. Thanks to you, I now have the support I need to move forward, and I will always be grateful for your role in making that happen. It is rare to find someone as passionate and skilled as you in their profession, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have had you on my side. Thank you again for everything you have done for me. I will always appreciate your hard work and the impact you have made in my life."

- Grateful Navy Veteran

"Veterans Legal Institute has been a beacon of light in advocating for our care. VLI's expertise, goodwill and continued support of the family's physical, financial, and mental care will be an experience we will never forget. The caregiver support we have been granted through this process has been life changing."

- Spouse of a disabled Marine

"Our family is infinitely grateful to Veterans Legal Institute! Their tenacity, interest, and undying support have been life-changing for us. They made the process of obtaining VA benefits easy and efficient. We could not be luckier to have them on our team."

- Family of a Marine Veteran

"I can't thank you enough. From the 1st time we talked on the phone and you laid out the plan, you've been right there leading the charge with your team."

- Grateful Marine Veteran





THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH US AND SUPPORTING VETERANS IN NEED.

Together, we can make the next decade even more impactful.

Text "VLI" to 44-321 to donate today!

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