

Supporting Our Troops



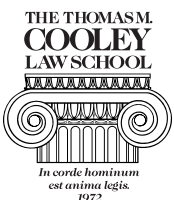
Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program

The Thomas M. Cooley Law School started the Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program to show our gratitude to those who leave civilian life to serve in combat zones. The grim reality of combat is that soldiers are saddled with worry about how their loved ones will be taken care of, should they not return. Equally distressing is the fact that many of our troops return to civilian life only to find a host of legal problems waiting for them. Thankful for their service, we wish to ease their burdens by alleviating their legal concerns. The Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program offers free legal assistance to Michigan military personnel who are deploying to, serving in, or returning from combat areas.

Before deployment, this program brings attorneys and law students to military bases in Michigan to help JAG officers prepare wills and powers-of-attorney for troops preparing to deploy. Cooley professors and students, and volunteer attorneys from across Michigan assemble at military facilities to prepare these documents, free of charge, to all deploying individuals who request the service.

Recently, over 100 deploying Marines were provided with free wills and powers-of-attorney at Michigan's Camp Grayling through the Service to Soldiers program, helped by a Cooley professor who led a team of five volunteer attorneys and five Cooley students. The group spent 17 hours over a weekend working until every soldier who wanted help was served. The attorneys, law students, and Cooley professors and staff involved will tell you that there is no greater satisfaction than working with individual soldiers, each with his or her own story to tell — real people facing real life and death. To be able to give them some peace of mind that their loved ones will be cared for should they not return is somber yet deeply rewarding.

Knowledge
Skills
Ethics



Through a new partnership with Chrysler Corporation and the Freedom Calls Foundation, Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program now offers legal consultations during deployment to troops stationed at five U.S. military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan via video-conferencing technology. Cooley professors and law students are able to offer confidential consultations from the Chrysler Tech Center in Auburn Hills directly to soldiers serving in the Middle East.

Legal consultations are also available to returning troops at military drills and other events through agreements with military leadership, and are handled by Cooley professors or volunteer attorneys, assisted by Cooley students. Those service men and women of E5 rank or below who are found to require the representation of an attorney are referred to one of the nearly 100 participating Michigan attorneys who are in the soldier's county and specialize in the law practice appropriate to the soldier's needs. This unique program is the only civilian program in Michigan specifically designed to assist with the immediate legal needs of military personnel returning from deployment.

Cooley is constantly recruiting attorneys from all over Michigan with various specializations who are willing to offer *pro bono* assistance. We have been overwhelmed with the level of participation and the generosity of the volunteer attorneys. The program depends on their willingness to take up legal battles for these soldiers, just as the soldiers have taken up our country's battles. The most common requests for assistance involve family law matters, labor law issues, landlord/tenant concerns, and creditor problems. Training for interested attorneys is offered at Cooley's campuses throughout the year and copies of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) are provided to all participating lawyers and students. Cooley is grateful to have received grant funds to help operate the program from both the Michigan State Bar Foundation and the Ingham County Bar Foundation.

This project began in April 2007 and was developed by Cooley faculty and staff working closely with military leadership and JAG representatives. To date, Cooley professors have offered over 70 consultations and made nearly 50 referrals to attorneys and area agencies. The program has prepared wills and powers-of-attorney for over 200 deploying troops as well.

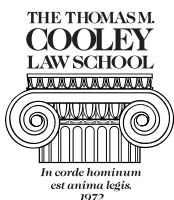
Following a recent Service to Soldiers event, Brigadier General Michael Peplinski said, "When it comes to thanks, we are the ones who are thankful for Cooley's support and care for our servicemembers. With such a small percentage who serve in uniform today as compared to the past century, this is something that clearly indicates that many in the society we come from are still behind those who serve in our military. Thanks to all at Cooley who are stepping up to this effort. It does not go unnoticed and we are grateful for their service and volunteerism."
(Michael L. Peplinski, Brig Gen, MI ANG Commander, 127th Wing)

For more information on Service to Soldiers, please contact Heather Spielmaker at Cooley Law School at (517) 371-5140, ext. 4112 or e-mail spielmah@cooley.edu. Please also visit cooley.edu/ethics to learn about 16 other programs operated through Cooley's Center for Ethics, Service, and Professionalism.

Knowledge

Skills

Ethics



Military Units Served to Date

- U.S. Marine Reserve 1/24 A-Company (Grand Rapids)
- U.S. Marine Reserve 1/24 B-Company (Saginaw)
- U.S. Marine Reserve 1/24 C-Company (Lansing)
- Michigan Army National Guard 1461st Transportation Company (Lansing)
- U.S. Army Reserve 415th Civil Affairs Battalion (Kalamazoo)
- U.S. Marine 471st Wing Support Squadron (Selfridge Air National Guard Base)