

PRESS RELEASE

October 15, 2014

Office of the Chief Judge
Madison County Courthouse
Edwardsville, IL 62025

For immediate release:

Veterans Legal Assistance Programs Announced

The Third Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee and the Veterans Assistance Commission are excited to announce the creation of the Third Circuit Veterans Legal Assistance Program (VLAP). The Veterans Assistance Commission has secured short-term limited funds to allow it to pay a reduced fee to attorneys to handle cases for Madison County honorably discharged veterans that can be concluded with four to five hours of legal services. The attorneys who participate are volunteering to accept the reduced fee to provide services for those who have served their country.

"We are announcing these programs near Veterans Day because this circuit has already been providing services for veterans and we are excited to be able to supplement our pro bono programs for veterans by matching them with attorneys to help them navigate the civil court system," noted Judge Barb Crowder, Chair of the Third Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee.

Free Legal Advice Dates for Veterans

The Third Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee is once again providing specific legal advice for veterans in honor of Veterans Day. This year, the committee will be providing free legal advice for Veterans on two dates. On Monday, November 10th and Wednesday, November 12th, the free 30 minute appointments will be held at the Legal Advice Center at the Madison County Law Library, 155 North Main Street in Edwardsville. Advice can be obtained for any subject except criminal law. To sign up for an appointment or to volunteer, individuals should call Betsy Mahoney at 618-296-5921.

Veterans Legal Assistance Project

In addition to free legal appointments for any veterans, this year some veterans may be able to have an attorney appear with them in court. "The Veterans' Assistance Commission provides financial assistance and other related services exclusively to Honorably Discharged Madison County Military Veterans and their families who reside in Madison County. The VAC and the Third Circuit Pro Bono Committee are committed to assisting eligible Madison County veterans who do not have attorneys for simple civil cases such as small claims issues, landlord-tenant cases, child support, visitation and related problems that veterans have difficulty in

handling on their own," stated Brad Lavite, Superintendent of the Veterans Assistance Commission in Madison County. Lavite is a member of the Third Circuit Pro Bono Committee and the committee attempts to meet needs of residents of Madison and Bond County who have unmet legal needs. He added: "The Veterans Assistance Commission is pleased to work with the Third Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee to provide more services for veterans and these limited funds are just a start in allowing limited financial assistance to pay some legal fees for low-income veterans."

To qualify, a veteran must provide proof of Madison County residency, and the Honorable Discharge (DD-214) from the last period of Active Duty. In addition, veterans applying for assistance must also have proof of income and expenses indicating an inability to pay. All applicants must meet income assistance guidelines and agree to adhere to VAC financial assistance guidelines, which may include active participation in VAC programs and services. Qualifying legal civil cases will also be a basis for financial assistance.

Burial Plot Donations

In addition to seeking attorneys and veterans to sign-up for the new VLAP program, the Committee is pleased to announce that plans are underway to assist members of the public who would like to donate burial plots to the Veterans Assistance Commission to be given to indigent veterans' and their families to assist with defraying the financial burden of burying a loved one. This service is part of the VAC's Veterans Grave Restoration Program (VGRP) and the transfer of burial plots is being headed by Tanja Cook, a member of the Pro Bono Committee and an attorney with Lueders, Robertson and Konzen. Any individual who wishes to donate a burial plot to the Veterans Commission will be provided the necessary paperwork to do so.

Community outreach

Members of the Third Circuit Pro Bono Committee recently staffed a table explaining pro bono and reduced fee services for veterans at the Veterans Appreciation Day hosted by the Rotary Clubs of Madison County at Alton Square. Those members were Assistant State's Attorney Sarah Smith, Tanja Cook from Lueders, Robertson and Konzen; Maureen Schuette from Schuette Law Offices, and Amy Maher, Director of Catholic Charities Legal Services. Additionally, Sarah Smith and State's Attorney's Tom Gibbons worked with the Pro Bono Committee to sponsor an amnesty day for all veterans who had outstanding warrants in Madison County to be able to attend court and resolve their issues without fear of arrest. Members of the committee are available to provide brochures and talks about available services to interested community groups.

The Veterans subcommittee consists of Amy Morgan from Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation; Assistant State's Attorney Sarah Smith; Tanja Cook from Lueders Robertson, and Konzen; Brad Lavite and Nicolette Watson, also from the Veterans Assistance Commission. The subcommittee is accepting volunteer attorneys and is looking for Honorably Discharged low-income Madison County veterans who need legal assistance in court to get the

program underway. Attorneys wishing to volunteer may contact a subcommittee member or Judge Crowder.

The Third Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee reminds all members of the public that free legal appointments to low income members of the public who do not have attorneys are available by appointment on any legal subject except criminal law, including but not limited to subjects such as family law or areas such as debt collection, landlord tenant, small claims, or any other civil area of law. The free appointments are held the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The appointments are for those of limited incomes who do not have attorneys and qualifying information will need to be provided. To make an appointment or to volunteer, call 618-296-5921 or e-mail Betsy Mahoney at bemahoney@co.madison.il.us.