



NVLSP

NATIONAL VETERANS LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

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Organizational Profile/Fact Sheet

The Need: Disability benefits, which are provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the branches of our military, are a step toward restoring the lives of these men and women. There are 4.5 million U.S. veterans have a service-connected disability. Yet each year, thousands of veterans have their claims for disability benefits wrongly denied or evaluated incorrectly. For many veterans, securing the proper amount of compensation due after returning home can be a discouraging and drawn-out process. Of the veterans who file appeals each year, thousands do not have a lawyer to represent them, mainly because it is unaffordable.

NVLSP's Response and Mission: National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) is a nonprofit organization that has worked since 1981 to ensure that the government delivers to our nation's 22 million veterans, active duty personnel, and their families the disability benefits to which they are entitled.

Core Programs:

- NVLSP provides free legal services to help veterans, service members, and their families secure disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States Armed Forces. NVLSP's individual representation services include appeals to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) and class actions (key class action accomplishments detailed below).
- NVLSP recruits, trains, and mentors lawyer and non-lawyer advocates who represent veterans, service members, and their family members on a pro bono basis on claims for benefits. NVLSP acts as a force multiplier providing in-person and webinar trainings.
- NVLSP publishes educational materials that empower advocates for veterans and service members. Since 1991, we have produced and updated annually, the *Veterans Benefits Manual*, the comprehensive treatise on veterans law.
- NVLSP provides free representation through the Lawyers Serving Warriors® (LSW) pro bono program. LSW offers free legal help to veterans and service members on a number of benefits issues; cases are placed with volunteer attorneys from law firms and corporate legal departments nationwide. Each volunteer attorney receives training and guidance by NVLSP's team of expert attorneys, ensuring that every veteran receives top notch legal representation.

Key Accomplishments: NVLSP has represented thousands of veterans in class action lawsuits, advanced veterans rights and achieved milestone victories in several cases.

- In October 2021, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia [certified a class action](#) brought by NVLSP and pro bono counsel Perkins Coie LLP, on behalf of Mr. Oscar D. Torres and former members of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps who were wrongfully denied military disability retirement. The lawsuit challenges the Navy's use of the "Properly Referred Policy" to deny military disability retirement to Mr. Torres and other similarly situated servicemembers. Up to 10,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans wrongfully denied military disability retirement.

NVLSP's other historic class actions include:

- [Sabo v. United States](#): This lawsuit alleged that between December 17, 2002 and October 14, 2008 the military illegally denied benefits to thousands of service members who returned from Iraq and Afghanistan with PTSD and were discharged. These service members were entitled to but denied a

- minimum 50% disability rating for PTSD. Working closely with Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP and lawyers from Hewlett-Packard Company, NVLSP reached a settlement agreement that provided retroactive and future disability benefits to more than 2,200 class members.
- [*Nehmer v. U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs*](#): This landmark case has resulted in over \$4.5 billion in VA compensation benefits to veterans and their survivors. The case originated with VA regulations mandating denial of benefits claims by Vietnam veterans who had diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange. In 1989, a federal court found the regulation unlawful, and class members received retroactive and prospective benefits. NVLSP, as class counsel, has represented the veterans and their survivors as the VA has recognized more diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure, including three recognized in August 2010. In 2011, NVLSP began monitoring over 150,000 VA adjudications related to the three new diseases. NVLSP reviewed over 10,000 of those cases which resulted in over \$40 million additional retroactive and prospective benefits to these class members. NVLSP's monitoring efforts are ongoing.

NVLSP's pro bono program Lawyers Serving Warriors® (LSW) offers free legal assistance to U.S. veterans and service members through a network of volunteer attorneys. In 2021, we placed nearly 500 cases through the program. LSW offers free legal services in five disability claims areas: claims for PTSD resulting from military sexual trauma that have been denied by the VA; applications for Combat-Related Special Compensation; representation to service members and veterans seeking military medical retirement through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System, applications to the Physical Disability Board of Review for an increase in the disability rating that the military assigned at the time of medical separation from service, and corrections of military records to grant military medical retirement; appeals to the Board of Veterans' Appeals and the US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims; and upgrading less than honorable discharges and applications to Boards for Correction of Military Records for veterans who were wrongfully discharged for personality disorder or adjustment disorder.

Through its training and educational programs, NVLSP leverages its expertise in veterans law to train thousands of advocates to better represent claimants seeking veterans benefits. NVLSP has:

- Trained thousands of service officers from national veterans service organizations.
- Authored *The Veterans Benefits Manual* (VBM), the nation's first treatise on veterans law. This 2,200 page manual is purchased by thousands of veterans advocates.
- Created *The Basic Training Course in Veterans Benefits*, an online course designed to provide advocates new to veterans law with a working understanding of how to successfully navigate the VA benefits system.
- [Developed a webinar training series](#): Each year, NVLSP conducts live training programs on several topics in veterans law for hundreds of veterans service officers, attorneys, and other individuals who are accredited to represent veterans before the VA.
- Created the [VA Benefit Identifier App](#) to help veterans and advocates determine the specific VA benefits to which a veteran is likely entitled.
- In 2021, over 5,000 attorneys, veterans service officers, and other advocates were trained by NVLSP Training and Publications. NVLSP works with state veterans agencies including: Georgia Department of Veterans Service, Missouri Veterans Commission, New York State Division of Veterans' Services, North Carolina Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, South Carolina Department of Veterans' Affairs, Tennessee Department of Veterans Services, Texas Veterans Commission, and the Virginia Department of Veterans Services.

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