



Ohio Adjutant General's Department

JOHN KASICH, GOVERNOR

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Widowed Soldier's goodwill spurs free legal representation program for Ohio military service members and veterans

*By Bill Pierce
Ohio National Guard Public Affairs*

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Military personnel and veterans who live in Franklin County soon will be able to receive free limited legal assistance from the Moritz College of Law at The Ohio State University.

Through a joint partnership between the Ohio National Guard Judge Advocate General Corps and Moritz College of Law, the Capt. Jonathan D. Grassbaugh Veterans Project has become a reality.

Col. Duncan D. Aukland, Ohio National Guard state judge advocate, was working to implement an initiative known as the Ohio Military Veteran Legal Assistance Program (OMVLAP) when he met Capt. Jenna C. Grassbaugh.

"Capt. Grassbaugh was searching for a way to make the tragic death of her husband in Iraq mean something," Aukland said. Jonathan Grassbaugh was killed in April 2007 in Zaganayah, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated while he was conducting a combat logistics patrol.

Jenna is active-duty Army, currently assigned to Fort Jackson, S.C., and attending law school at OSU through the Army's Funded Legal Education Program. Grassbaugh wanted to do something more with the proceeds she received from her husband's life insurance benefit, so she formed the Capt. Jonathan D. Grassbaugh Veterans Project to assist Ohio military personnel and veterans.

"Jon's personal motto in life was 'non sibi,' which is Latin for 'not for oneself.' This Veterans Project is the very epitome of that philosophy and embodies the meaning of his sacrifice," Grassbaugh said. "It illustrates the kind of selflessness with which he lived his life and was evidenced every day in the way he loved me. To say that I was lucky to experience that kind of love — even if fleetingly — does not do justice to how grateful I feel to call myself his wife."

Through this program, third-year law students are chosen to assist military personnel and veterans (regardless of income), providing legal representation for five specific areas: landlord/tenant issues (the right to terminate a lease); Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (getting a default judgment removed); Rule of Practice Civil Rule No. 60 (statutory right that governs the process); debtor/creditor issues (someone is being sued); and representing service members if an impending default judgment is entered against them while they are deployed (foreclosure remedies).

The five specific areas recommended by the program development team will be approved by OSU law school officials in the near future, according to Aukland.

Maj. Gen. Deborah A. Ashenhurst, Ohio adjutant general, and Brig. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., Ohio assistant adjutant general for Army, have offered the Ohio National Guard JAG Corps to provide supervision and mentorship for the students, Aukland said.

While requesting Franklin County-area volunteers, Aukland received six positive responses from attorneys willing to assist with the program beginning this fall. Aukland is hopeful that additional attorneys will offer assistance with this program because it is a tremendous service for Ohio's military service members and veterans.

"We have many local attorneys who have been judge advocates and we think an effort can be made to reach out to them and get them involved," Aukland said. "These are essential legal services that our military members and veterans need but many cannot afford. That's why this program and the volunteers are tremendously appreciated by our Ohio National Guard leadership and its members."

The Franklin County Municipal Court determined that the training provided to the students meets requirements for participating lawyers to be covered under OSU's malpractice insurance.

Although this project will begin with Franklin County as a pilot program, Aukland said he hopes it will spread throughout Ohio over time.

"Certainly, other colleges in the major metropolitan areas could have a similar program," Aukland said. "Those colleges have law schools that are connected with their community, and I am certain they have enough military personnel and veterans to warrant a program like this one."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Bill Pierce at 614-336-4499 or william.k.pierce.mil@mail.mil.