

Veterans Benefits

Veterans Benefits

Law, Theory, and Practice

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Preface

The Aims of This Book

While the authors and publisher of this book will be delighted at any use a purchaser might care to put it to, including boosting a toddler up to the table, the authors have created it with certain aims in mind. First and foremost, it seeks to provide a useful and complete resource for teachers of veterans law, particularly in the practical context of preparing student advocates in law clinics to assist veterans with their claims for benefits. Veterans Law Clinics need a single resource that

- pulls together an explanation of the complex and often bewildering VA claims system;
- helps students understand the intricacies of that system and how to navigate it on behalf of a client;
- challenges students with realistic problems similar to what they will encounter in their clients' cases; and
- provides the practical advice and stimulates development of the advocacy skills necessary to provide veterans with competent and successful representation.

The authors have found nothing that quite meets these needs and thus have sought to create something to meet them. The *Veterans Benefits Manual* created and updated by the National Veterans Legal Services Program is as close to a Bible as we have in the veterans field, and the authors of the present book would never venture to practice veterans law without a copy of the *Manual* somewhere close to hand. But like the Bible, the *VBM* is vast, containing far more material than could be addressed even in a two-semester veterans clinic course. And yet it lacks something a textbook needs: exercises, problems, and challenges for students to cut their teeth on before gnawing on real client issues. We have sought to supply those things. Indeed, the architecture of the book is conceived around problems or challenges, each chapter including one or more challenges of some sort for students to think through, preparing them and giving them context for the actual operation of the claims system they will confront.

We also believe that there is value in reflecting upon the nature and genesis of legal systems in seeking to understand how institutions became what they are and why they impose the sometimes peculiar obstacles they do. Law school is the time for incipient lawyers to mull over these matters, in class or over lattes in the student

lounge, for once they enter the rough-and-tumble of law practice, most lawyers have little leisure for reflection.

Beyond law school clinics, the book should also serve well for survey courses in veterans law, as the issues presented by the system are amply explored. Court decisions on a variety of issues are included, with questions for analysis and discussion.

And, because of its practical, problem-solving orientation, the book could serve to educate and train service officers and other non-lawyers interested in helping veterans with their claims. While legal concepts are discussed in the book, the veteran claims system was developed for non-lawyers to navigate — though it is admittedly not easy to do — so many of the skills and techniques cultivated here do not require any deep understanding of law.

For those involved in programs of actual representation of veterans, the Teacher's Manual will include a compendium of documents with annotations for the full range of veteran claim procedures.

It is our hope that the need we saw for such a book is shared by others and that our work will supply something valuable to your program. If not, plop the kid on it at the dinner table.

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