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Free event to help W.Va. veterans

By Ashley B. Craig

If you are a veteran or a military service member who needs help with a legal issue, the West Virginia State Bar is offering to help.

The State Bar will host a free call-in line from 3 to 4 p.m. on Nov. 10 to provide legal information for veterans and service members, according to a flyer from the organization.

The State Bar is working with Legal Aid of West Virginia to offer a free continuing legal education course focusing on veterans issues to lawyers. In exchange, the attorneys are asked to stay for an hour afterward to answer legal calls from veterans.

Lewis Brewer, co-chairman of the State Bar's Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, said the course is being offered to teach attorneys about some of the legal issues veterans and military service members may face. The call-in is to offer veterans free access to legal information.

"There are some things that the average lawyer probably does not know about people in the military, it just depends on what the situation is," said Brewer, who served in the Air Force from 1971 to 1993.

He said most lawyers can answer if a veteran has a "routine question" about something like child support but get tripped up when it comes to legal issues that could come up if there's a deployment involved.

"That's part of what the training will be about, trying to find more attorneys not necessarily donating time but becoming more interested," Brewer said.

Attorneys in West Virginia have to attend continuing legal education courses every so often. Those courses can be pricey to the attorney or firm with travel and lodging expenses on top of the course cost. This course is being offered to attorneys for free and will be broadcast to multiple Legal Aid of West Virginia offices all over the state with the stipulation that attendees take calls for an hour afterward.

Anita Casey, executive director of the State Bar, said two attorneys involved with Veterans Administration offices in West Virginia will lead a two-hour discussion with attorneys. They will run a question and answer session during that time as well.

Matthew Kelly, a lawyer with the Veterans Administration office in Huntington, and Stephen Butera, a lawyer with the Veterans Administration office in Bridgeport, will talk about issues unique to veterans and military service members and will go over some questions a veteran or service member may ask their attorney about dealing with the Veterans Administration, Casey said.

Casey said the most common questions the State Bar receives during the sessions are regarding divorces and foreclosures.

The Nov. 10 call-in event is focused on veterans and military service members.

Those veterans or military service members with questions may call 1-800-642-3617 from 3 to 4 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 10.

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