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For Immediate Release
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Veterans Legal Institute Partners with the USC Gould School of Law to Establish a Monthly Veterans' Legal Clinic

LOS ANGELES, California– On Wednesday, October 11, 2017, Veterans Legal Institute (VLI) collaborated with students from the University of Southern California (USC) Gould School of Law to conduct the USC/VLI Veterans Legal Clinic. During the clinic, the first of what will be a monthly program, twenty-four USC students contributed their time to assist low income veterans with civil matters such as family law issues, landlord-tenant issues, and discharge upgrades. Members of the Public Interest Law Foundation (PILF), the law students met with eleven at USC's downtown Los Angeles campus, conducting in-take interviews.

After the clinic, VLI CEO Mr. Stirling, a Gould graduate himself (class of 2000), noted the importance of student-run legal clinics. "Legal clinics allow law students the opportunity to perform hands-on legal work for those who cannot afford private attorneys," Mr. Stirling said. "It is tremendous to see future attorneys serving the men and women who have served the nation in uniform, keeping faith with those who have sacrificed so much to protect us and maintain our freedom," he added.

Partnering with USC will allow VLI, which is based in Santa Ana, to further expand its reach into Los Angeles, where more than 325,000 veterans reside. It will also deepen the ties

between VLI and USC, where Mr. Stirling and Laura Riley, a VLI board member and staff attorney with the LA County Bar Association, teach the Veterans Legal Practicum during the spring semester.

"PILF is proud to partner with VLI in serving veterans in our community," commented Matthew Saria, a second-year law student and co-president of PILF. "By combining VLI's expertise and PILF's commitment and enthusiasm, we hope this clinical partnership can help address the legal needs of current and former service members."

Sarah Walkowicz, also part of PILF's leadership team, explained that the clinic was both practical and meaningful. "The USC/VLI Veterans Legal Clinic offers students a unique opportunity to hone their analytical skills while developing a deeper understanding of veterans' legal realities," Ms. Walkowicz said. Participating in the program gives students "a chance to give back to a community that has sacrificed so much," she said.

The USC students, all PILF members, who conducted the in-takes interviews during the clinic, seemed to agree. "The veterans clinic reassured me that law school was the right choice," Aliyah Redic, a first-year law student, said. Jodi Tai, a student who assisted a veteran with a disability claim, called her work a "valuable hands-on experience on how to combine professionalism with emotional empathy."

With more than 1,200 homeless veterans living in Los Angeles, free legal assistance is a vital part of helping veterans get back on their feet. The only military-specific legal aid organization in California, VLI receives over 50 applications per week for its services, assisting nearly every veteran who applies.

"Our ability to meet the high demand is dependent upon students participating in our clinical programs," Mr. Stirling said, who is also a reserve JAG officer in the Army National

Guard. Striking a serious tone, he added, “Without partnerships like the one with the USC Gould School of Law, we would be mission-incapable.”

The next USC/VLI Veterans Legal Clinic will be held on November 8, 2017, from 5-7 pm. For more information, contact Mr. Stirling at dstirling@vetslegal.com or Mr. Saria at matthew.saria.2019@lawmail.usc.edu.