

## VETERANS DAY MESSAGE FROM THE SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS INITIATIVE

Every year on November 11<sup>th</sup>, Americans unite with gratitude to honor the service and sacrifices of our veterans. In these times when Americans hold and express widely differing points of view on issues ranging from politics to religion, from policing to immigration, and from education to the environment, we can all agree that our ongoing right to express these differing views exists because of the actions of those who have fought to protect this nation and way of life. So, at the Department of Justice's Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative ("Initiative"), we want to extend our thanks to all those who have served in the military, as well as to their family members.

We at the Initiative are striving to show our gratitude not only with our words, but also with our deeds, by working to ensure that servicemembers, veterans, and their families receive the full benefit of the laws the Department of Justice enforces that are designed to protect their rights. For example, each year the Initiative conducts numerous outreach events at military installations across the country in an effort to educate military members about their employment, housing, financial and voting rights, and to learn firsthand from servicemembers about the legal issues impacting them. Among the locations visited by the Initiative in 2017 are Fort Dix in New Jersey, Luke Air Force Base in Arizona, where Initiative staff attorneys were joined by Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, Hurlburt Field, Duke Field, and Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida, and Camp Atterbury in Indiana.

The Initiative has also organized numerous training events this year, including two educational events where the Department of Justice hosted United States Army War College attendees and shared information about the role of the Department in military legal matters. Initiative staff also lectured on military financial, housing and/or employment rights at a National Guard Bureau convening in Norman, Oklahoma, The John Marshall Law School's 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Employee Benefits Symposium in Chicago, Illinois, George Mason University's Antonin Scalia Law School, the National Advocacy

Center in South Carolina, and to the Department of Veterans Affairs Loan Guaranty National Practice Group, to name a few.

Additionally, on November 2, 2017, the Department hosted a convening of the Judge Advocates General of the Armed Forces, a roundtable event where Initiative staff were joined by Attorney General Sessions, Associate Attorney General Rachel Brand, and senior JAG officers from each of the services for a discussion of military legal issues and how best to protect the rights of servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

The Initiative also secured funding in late 2016 that enabled three dedicated term Assistant United States Attorneys to be hired in three districts across the country to enforce the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (“SCRA”), a far reaching federal law that provides a wide range of financial and housing protections to those in military service. This funding also helped to secure two additional SCRA enforcement attorneys in the District of Columbia.

But what do these efforts mean in terms of real benefits to servicemembers? With respect to the SCRA, to date the Department of Justice’s cases and settlements have brought in almost \$460 million in monetary relief for over 118,000 servicemembers whose financial and/or housing rights were violated. With respect to the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (“USERRA) and military members’ civilian employment rights, as of September 2017, the Department of Justice, working with Offices of the United States Attorneys across the country, has filed 101 lawsuits either on behalf of or representing servicemembers.

The men and women who have chosen to answer the call to service are among the best this country has to offer. Please join the Department of Justice and the Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative today, and every day, in thanking our brave and devoted veterans. And for our current military members and veterans, please know that the Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative will keep fighting for you.