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## INFORMATION FOR RELEASE

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## Legal Aid Society Launches New Program to Help Veterans with Legal Issues

NASHVILLE, Tenn., Dec. 19, 2017 – Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland announced today that it has launched a new program with the Nashville Bar Association (NBA) to support veterans with legal issues.

The new program, called The Veterans Project, is a partnership among the NBA, Veterans Court, Office of the Mayor of Metropolitan Nashville, Metro Homelessness Commission, Operation Stand Down TN (OSDTN) and Legal Aid Society's Volunteer Lawyers Program.

While the program is primarily focused on helping veterans who are homeless or facing homelessness, help with civil legal problems is available to all veterans. The scope of civil legal issues for which veterans can seek help includes child support, debt, bankruptcy, car purchase/repair, family law, expungement and reinstatement of driver's licenses.

"Based on the experience of OSDTN and Veterans Court, we were able to identify a set of common legal issues that veterans face," said Lucinda Smith, director of Legal Aid Society's Volunteer Lawyers Program. "Many veterans experience physical and mental health issues, lack of income, involvement with the criminal justice system — and all of these things together have a negative impact on their ability to get and maintain housing."

As part of the Veterans Project partnership, Legal Aid Society will take direct referrals from the Metro Homelessness Commission and the Veterans Court. Legal Aid Society will also coordinate weekly staffing of “Attorney for the Day” events at OSDTN, where veterans can meet with a volunteer attorney for counsel in identifying legal issues and then be referred for additional representation.

“This program allows us to create new portals for veterans to find legal help,” Smith added. “And by partnering with wonderful local organizations like OSDTN and the Veterans Court, we are able to expand our resources to serve more veterans in the Middle Tennessee area.”

Attorney for the Day events will occur every Wednesday at Operation Stand Down in Nashville from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Attorneys will meet with clients per week on a first-come, first-served basis.

“One in five veterans has symptoms of a mental health disorder or cognitive impairment and when left untreated, mental health disorders can directly lead to involvement in the criminal justice system,” said Melissa Blackburn, Presiding Judge of the Veterans Court. “The NBA Veterans Project gives us the opportunity to help those in our community who served our country reassert control over their own lives.”

#### **About Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland**

Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland advocates for fairness and justice under the law. The nonprofit law firm offers free civil legal representation and educational programs to help people in its region receive justice, protect their well-being and support opportunities to overcome poverty. It serves 48 counties from offices in Clarksville, Columbia, Cookeville, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Oak Ridge and Tullahoma. Legal Aid Society is funded in part by United Way. Learn more at [www.las.org](http://www.las.org), or by following the firm on [Facebook](#).

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