

Legal Assistance Program Content Guide

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The following established style guidelines reflect the long-standing practices of developers and editors of content for the Legal Assistance Program area. They are consistent with rules and guidance outlined in the Associated Press Stylebook and reflective of Office of Military Community and Family Policy style and usage preferences.

Content Tips

- Pay attention to the overall organization and flow of an article. Information and ideas should be logically organized, and there should be some sense of continuity or flow from one idea to the next.
- Avoid redundancy.
- Write in a way that doesn't assume the reader is either male or female. Keep it neutral.
- Write in relationship-neutral terms, such as "partner" or "couple."
- Flesh out and clarify statements and ideas.
- Ensure that subheads reflect the content of the following text.
- Focus on the positive side of content as much as possible.
- Keep the wide audience range in mind.
- Include the following disclaimer at the beginning and end of each article:
 - The information contained on this website is designed to educate and inform service members and their families on their personal legal affairs. Nothing contained on the website is a substitute for the competent legal advice of a licensed attorney. Service members and their families seeking legal advice should consult the staff of the nearest installation Legal Assistance Office."

Things to Avoid

- Making assumptions.
- Telling people how they feel.
- Telling people what they should/need to/must/ought to/can't/won't do.
- Telling people what they always/never do.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation or acronym	Full title
SCRA	Servicemembers Civil Relief Act
POA	Power of attorney
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FVAP	Federal Voting Assistance Program
JAG	judge advocate general

Preferred Terms

Acceptable
Use can, may or might instead of will or are
Use military life instead of military lifestyle
Use often or generally instead of always
Use partner, spouse instead of husband, wife
Use some or many instead of most or all
Use tend to instead of usually

Definitions

Term	Definition
Advance medical directive	Any written declaration regarding future medical treatment to provide, withdraw or withhold life-prolonging procedures, including hydration and sustenance, in the event of a terminal condition or persistent unaware state; or to appoint another person to make health care decisions for an individual under circumstances stated in the declaration, if the individual is determined to be incapable of making informed health care decisions, also known as a health care power of attorney or a living will.
Alimony	Payment of support ordered by a court from one spouse to the other spouse after a separation or divorce so that the spouse receiving the payment can maintain the lifestyle he or she was accustomed to during the marriage. Also referred to as spousal support or maintenance.
Annulment	A judgment by a court that retroactively invalidates a marriage to the date of its formation.
Appellate jurisdiction	The power of a court to review and change outcomes of decisions of lower courts.
Child support	Financial support paid by a parent to help support a child or children not living in their household.
Civilian criminal proceeding	A criminal or quasi-criminal trial or other judicial hearing conducted by a municipal, state, federal (outside the Defense Department) or foreign judge or official.
Civil proceeding	A trial or hearing in a noncriminal proceeding, either judicial or administrative in nature, conducted by a municipal, state, federal (outside the DOD) or foreign judge or official.
Contingent legal fee case	The type of case where the fee for professional legal services charged by civilian lawyers customarily is dependent upon the successful outcome of the case and agreed to be a percentage of the client's recovery. Actions in tort, such as personal injury, wrongful death and property damage matters are often handled on this basis.
Custody	Legal determination that establishes with whom a child shall live: the mother, father or other adult.

Term	Definition
Debts	After a person dies, debts are paid before any inheritance is passed on to heirs. You're usually not legally responsible for the debts of a parent or relative. Their estate is responsible for paying the remaining debts.
Demobilization legal counseling	Advice provided to service members on their legal benefits, protections, entitlements, rights and potential issues relating to their release from active duty.
Divorce	A court decree that terminates a marriage; also known as marital dissolution.
Durable power of attorney	A written instrument by which a person (the principal) appoints another as his or her agent and grants the agent the authority to perform certain specified acts or kinds of acts on behalf of the principal, and which specifies that the authority so conferred will either not be affected by the subsequent disability or incapacity of the principal or will become effective upon the disability or incapacity of the principal.
Estate	The assets left behind after a person's death.
Estate planning	The continuing process of arranging for the use, conservation and transfer of one's property and wealth during life and upon death. The process produces a plan that may include: a testator/ testatrix will, military testamentary instrument, a trust, life insurance, an advance medical directive, a health care power of attorney, designation of anatomical gifts and other dispositive documents.
Estate taxes (or taxes on your inheritance)	Federal and state taxes may be due after a death. In some states, the taxes are paid by the estate's assets, and in others, they are paid by the inheritors.
Executor	The person named in the will or appointed by the court, who gathers, secures and manages the estate's assets.
Family care plan	A document that outlines, on service-specific forms, the person(s) who will provide care for a service member's dependent family members in the absence of the service member due to military duty (training exercises, temporary duty, deployments, etc.). The plan outlines the legal, medical, logistical, educational, monetary and religious arrangements for care of the service member's dependent family members. The plan must include all reasonably foreseeable situations and be sufficiently detailed and systematic to provide for a smooth, rapid transfer of responsibilities to the caregiver in the absence of the service member.

Term	Definition
Family member	Individuals whose relationship to a military sponsor leads to entitlements, benefits or privileges from the military services.
Fee basis	A fee for professional legal services that is charged to the client.
Garnish	Legal proceeding under which part of a person’s wages and/or assets is withheld for payment of a debt such as child support. This term is usually used when an income or wage withholding is involuntary.
In-court representation	Appearing or providing notice of appearance as counsel on behalf of a client in a military, civil or civilian criminal proceeding.
Inheritance	Practice of passing along property upon the owner’s death to a designated individual or individuals, who are called inheritors, heirs and beneficiaries.
JAGC	Judge Advocate General’s Corps. The legal branch of the services concerned with military justice and military law.
Judge advocate	A military officer who advises the government on courts-martial and administers the conduct of courts-martial. The officers who are judge advocates and counsel assigned to the accused come from the office of the judge advocate general or are appointed by it to work certain court-martials.
Legal assistance attorney	An attorney (either a military judge advocate or civilian attorney) who provides legal assistance within the military on a part- or full-time basis.
Legal assistance office	Office on a military installation providing legal assistance services to eligible clients.
Legal Assistance Program	Service branch program providing legal advice, counseling and other help to eligible clients pertaining to their personal legal affairs.
Legal separation	A court-decreed right to live apart, with the rights and obligations of divorced persons, but without divorce. The parties are still married and cannot remarry. A spouse may petition for a legal separation usually on the same basis as for a divorce, and include requests for child custody, alimony, child support and division of property.

Term	Definition
Memorandum of understanding	Written agreements with different agencies or organizations in the civilian community that help to clarify roles and responsibilities and coordinate efforts when responding to incidents of domestic abuse. Defense Department policy requires law enforcement and legal officials on military installations to seek to establish memoranda of understanding with their civilian counterparts to improve information sharing and investigation of domestic abuse incidents involving service members.
Military administrative case	Any legal case pertaining to a military justice action conducted pursuant to military regulation.
Military justice proceeding	A court-martial or hearing conducted pursuant to the Uniform Code of Military Justice or implementing military regulations. Legal assistance attorneys do not provide advice or representation for military justice proceedings.
Ministerial service	A type of assistance that does not require the exercise of personal judgment or discretion, such as witnessing or notarizing documents.
No-fee basis	Professional legal services where no fee is charged. The client may still be held accountable for paying or reimbursing the attorney for the payment of court costs and administrative filing fees.
Notary services	Notary services are services rendered by a state-commissioned notary public including general notary acts such as acknowledgments, jurats, oaths, affirmations, protests and depositions. The exact list of notary acts that a notary is authorized to do varies from state to state.
Power of attorney	A written instrument whereby one person, as principal, appoints another as his/her agent and confers authority to perform certain specified acts, kinds of acts or full authority to act on behalf of the principal.
Paternity	Legal determination of fatherhood. Paternity must be established before a court can order child support or medical support.

Term	Definition
Pro bono publico	Legal services provided by civilian attorneys for the public good or welfare on a voluntary basis or to comply with state bar
Pro se	An appearance in a proceeding by a person who represents himself or herself without the assistance of counsel during the proceeding.
Reduced-fee basis	The act of providing professional legal services at a fee substantially below that which prevails for a particular legal service in the locale in which the civilian attorney practices. The client may still be held accountable for paying or reimbursing the lawyer for the payment of court costs and administrative filing fees.
Servicemembers Civil Relief Act	Also known as SCRA, a law that provides important safeguards to members on active-duty status in the area of financial management, including rental agreements, security deposits, evictions, installment contracts, credit card interest rates, mortgages, civil judicial proceedings and income tax payments.
Settlor	The person who creates a trust — a right of property, real or personal — by a written trust declaration to be held and administered by a trustee for the benefit of another. Also known as a trustor or donor.
Staff judge advocate	The principal legal adviser of a legal office. Most levels of command, usually beginning at the special court-martial convening authority level, will have a servicing legal office.
Testator/testatrix	A person who makes or has made a valid will. A person who dies without having made a will is said to have died intestate. A testatrix is the female form of testator.
Tort	A wrongful act, not including a breach of contract or trust, that results in injury to another’s person, property, reputation or the like and for which the injured party is entitled to compensation.
Trust	This is another way for a person to transfer their estate to their named beneficiaries. In setting up a trust, the person names a “trustee” to distribute the property to named beneficiaries according to certain instructions.
Trustee	An individual or corporation named by an individual that sets aside property to be used for the benefit of another person to manage the property as provided by the terms of the document that created the arrangement.

Term	Definition
Uniform Code of Military Justice	The basis for all military law in the United States. The Uniform Code of Military Justice contains laws applicable only to members of the U.S. military. Legal cases brought against service members under the Uniform Code of Military Justice are handled by the Judge Advocate Corps and are not covered under the scope of the Legal Assistance Program.
Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act	Also known as USERRA, legislation that prohibits discrimination against persons who serve in the military services and protects the rights of service members in civilian jobs who must leave employment to serve in the military.
Will	A legal document that states how a person’s property is to be distributed after death. If there is no will, every state has “intestacy laws” that provide a formula for determining distribution.

Official Resources

Legislation or regulations

- [Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, 5 U.S.C. § 552a](#)
- [The Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552](#)
- [Servicemembers Civil Relief Act \(“SCRA”\) 50 U.S.C. App. §§501-597b1](#)

Military OneSource websites

- [Legal Aid for Military Service Members | Military OneSource](#)