

Legal Assistance Program Content Guide

The following established style guidelines reflect the longstanding 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.

Do

- 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 gender-neutral terms, except if appropriate (for example, gender-specific services/groups).
- 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 in 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.”

Do Not

- Make assumptions.
- Tell people how they feel.
- Tell people what they should/need to/must/ought/can’t/won’t do.
- Tell people what they always/never do.

Formatting

- “Less is more” -- be concise.
- Use bulleted formatting for clarity when appropriate.

General

- Keep sentences short.

Preferred Terms

Preferred	As opposed to
military life	military lifestyle
some or many	most or all
can or may or might	will or are
often or generally	always
tend to	usually
partner, spouse	husband, wife

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 vegetative 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 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 that he or she was accustomed to during the marriage. Also called 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 Department of Defense) 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 Department of Defense) or foreign judge or official.

Term	Definition
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 the child shall live: the mother, father or other adult.
Demobilization legal counseling	Advice provided to service members on their legal benefits, protections, entitlements, rights and potential problems 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 by which the principal 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 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 some or all of these: 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.

Term	Definition
Family care plan	A document that outlines, on service-specific forms, the person(s) who shall 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.
Family member	Individuals whose relationship to the military sponsor leads to entitlements, benefits or privileges by the military services.
Fee basis	A fee for professional legal services 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 like 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 to a designated individual(s) upon the owner's death.
JAG	Judge Advocate General's Corps. The legal branch of the services concerned with military justice and military law.

Term	Definition
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-time 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.
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. Department of Defense 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.

Term	Definition
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 in a state 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.
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 requirements.
Pro se	An appearance in a proceeding by a person who represents himself or herself without the assistance of counsel during the proceeding.

Term	Definition
Reduced-fee basis	The act of providing professional legal services at a fee reduced 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 advisor on the staff of a commander who possesses general court-martial convening authority.
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	An agreement under which one person transfers title to specific property to another who agrees to hold or manage it for the benefit of a third person.

Term	Definition
Trustee	An individual or corporation named by an individual, who 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.
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	The declaration by a person (the testator/testatrix) of how the testator desires the testator's/testatrix's property to be disposed of after the testator's/testatrix's death. A will is often the principal document in an individual's estate plan.