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OP-ED: Helping veterans a Stand Down

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The phrase, “stand down” in common military jargon, refers to a state of rest or ease after a period of high alert. When a soldier, sailor, marine or airman “stands down” — he or she places their weapon aside, partakes in a little rest and relaxation, eats a good meal and “hits the rack” for a restful sleep. Service members stand down to rejoin the fight with a revitalized sense of purpose and vigor.

It is an unfortunate reality, however, that many veterans who have served our country and made significant sacrifices to help ensure our freedom, still find themselves engaged in a grueling battle for survival each day. For those veterans who are homeless, unemployed and lack such basic necessities as food, medical care and legal support, life can be a dismal existence.



Imagine the possibilities, however, if a gathering of legal professionals, judges, medical providers and the like were to meet up and offer support to those homeless veterans who need our help? Enter the 2014 Monterey County Homeless Veterans’ “Stand Down” — held at Fort Ord Army Base in Monterey Aug. 2-4. For over 400 homeless veterans at the Stand Down, the rays of sunlight and hope shone brightly through the overcast skies over the nonoperational light infantry Army base. With the assistance of numerous public service agencies, private lawyers and judges, hundreds of homeless veterans received the support they needed to help get their life affairs in order. The Stand Down gave many of our homeless veterans a warm and dry place to sleep, and an opportunity to receive myriad services such as medical and dental care, veterinary services for their animals, and yes — legal advice from lawyers regarding all sorts of issues ranging from VA hospital/medical care to family law issues, debt collection, criminal and civil matters and many more. For certain veterans with minor criminal cases, court proceedings were held for Monterey (Hon. Sam Lavorato Jr.), San Mateo (Hon. John L. Grandsaert), Santa Cruz (Hon. John M. Gallagher) and Santa Clara (Hon. Stephen V. Manley) counties. Their cases had been pre-approved by participating county district attorneys, who gave the four judges who heard the cases full discretion to dispose of them in one day. Also present were college representatives, Goodwill, the Social Security Administration and the Department of Motor Vehicles.

The result of the Stand Down was awe-inspiring to behold. All in all, many of the life trials and tribulations the veterans had struggled to carry, were transformed into workable challenges that could be actively addressed by those present to render aid. As for me, I felt extremely honored and humbled to provide legal consultation to the scores of men and women who simply needed a point in the right direction. The Army Rangers have a motto; “leave no man behind.” The motto is not intended for the purpose of inspiration, but a credo by which to live. In a world wherein we ask so much sacrifice of our troops, we should be there for them when they need us. We cannot leave them behind. As for me, I remain humbled and honored to have served in our armed forces. For a few days, I took part in the Stand Down with Redwood City attorney Jim Hartnett on behalf of a newly formed organization Veteran Lawyers of San Mateo County to provide legal support and empower my fellow veterans. It helped reinforce why I became a lawyer and was a keen reminder that the veterans who served this nation continue to place service before self, as should we.

Christopher Lavorato is a senior associate at the law firm of Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy and a former captain in the U.S. Army Aviation Branch.