



## PRESIDENT'S PAGE ASHLEIGH E. AITKEN

### Don't Forget to Call Your Mother and Thank a Vet

**A**rmed Forces Day and Memorial Day offer us a chance to remember those we have lost, and those in our community that continue to serve our country and protect our freedoms. As lawyers, we take an oath to defend the Constitution, but it is a very different commitment than the one asked of the U.S. Armed Forces. I recently attended an event on the state of the Orange County veteran where Admiral Michael Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke of the sacrifice that soldiers make to train and be prepared for combat, and the failure of both the military and society to prepare soldiers to re-enter civilian life and communities. While we have many success stories among our bar and bench, a recent study of Orange County veterans revealed that a vast number of veterans leave the military without a job, without permanent housing, and with ongoing unaddressed physical and psychological health problems. Some sobering statistics about Orange County veterans:

- 19% of post-9/11 veterans, and 14% of pre-9/11 veterans reported a lack of consistent housing in the past two months;
- 44% of post-9/11 veterans screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 19% considered attempting suicide, and 16.8% developed a suicide plan;
- 66% of pre-9/11 female veterans and 56% post-9/11 female veterans reported being sexually harassed in the military, with 40% of pre-9/11 females veterans and 22% post-9/11 females veterans reported being sexually assaulted.

The State of the American Veteran: The Orange County Veterans Study (2015), *Orange County Community Foundation*, available at [www.oc-cf.org](http://www.oc-cf.org).

The report identified three key areas that veterans need assistance with: employment, health care, and housing. It should come as no surprise that these issues often end up as legal matters, with our *pro bono* services scrambling to fill the vast need. One of the main barriers faced by lawyers who take on these cases *pro bono* is a discomfort with working with veterans and within the military system. Volunteers have reported a struggle with identifying with veterans, as well as a lack of knowledge of the military life and the acronyms used. As part of the OCBA's ongoing commitment to assist with veterans' issues, we are hosting our first of several MCLE trainings on how to provide military-specific services to our nation's heroes. Please mark your calendar and join us on May 12 to learn how you can help.

#### Mommy Esquire Committee

Recently, I was traveling and called to check in with the family. My nanny shared the delightful announcement from my daughter that the next day was a "dress-up" day where the students were to pick their favor-

ite literary character and come in costume as that person or thing. My middle girl picked Glinda from the Oz series. One trip to our Disney princess warehouse/closet . . . done. My eldest picked Amelia Earhart. My husband kindly decided we would just skip the event, but as most working moms out there would understand, I thought I was up for the challenge. How was I to put together a 1930s-era aviation ensemble from afar? I had Michael grab my daughter's brown riding breeches, a white tee, brown jacket, one of my long scarves, his snowboarding beanie, and a pair of swim goggles. I was very impressed with myself, and a crisis was averted. (I learned from the school pictures the next day that my daughter had backed out of the outfit because it was 90 degrees, not ideal aviator suit weather. Thanks to a trip to Party City, she was Sacajawea.)

I relay this story because I am always impressed by the rabbits that working moms can pull out of their hats after a long day of work. A few years back, it was stories like this and the greater challenges of work-life balance that led a group of female lawyers to meet for lunch and discuss the obstacles facing working mothers and potential solutions and strategies. As the group grew, it was decided to petition the OCBA to make

it a formal committee, and Mommy Esquire was started. It raised a few eyebrows (putting it lightly) from some elder stateswomen of the bar, and I was told that the creation of the group "set women in the law back thirty years." I was against the creation of Mommy Esquire, not for such extreme sentiments, but because we used to meet at a cantina with margaritas and now we would have to be more formal.

I understand the discomfort of some who do not agree with identifying oneself as a "female lawyer" or a "mother-female-lawyer," but also respect the right of women to self-identify and associate as they wish. Even Betty Friedan recognized in her later writings the failure of "second wave feminism" to push women to be men at work and women at home. Friedan called for a reboot of feminism that invited men into the discussion of how to change society, institutions, and public values as a way to elevate the status of women. The group focuses on the challenges specific to working parents, recognizing that work-life balance issue disproportionately fall on women. It is important to note that Mommy Esquire is targeted to

all parents of school-aged children, and has grown to include MCLE programs, family days, and monthly meetings to discuss the issues that effect working parents. I intend to add a forum to discuss the discomfort around the committee, its name, and its focus. I hope to have women and men from a variety of perspectives weigh in on how the committee can best serve its members.

On a personal note, I want to wish my own amazing mother a Happy Mother's Day! I would not be where I am today without her daily love and encouragement. She is supportive, thinks every case I am working on is the most interesting case in the world, attends every trial, and tells me I am the prettiest girl in the world, which some days—especially mid-trial with my roots showing—I really need to hear. I love you, Bette!



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