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Nov. 30, 2015
Contact: Lisa Brown
(949) 440-6700, ext. 123
lbrown@ocbar.org

Orange County Bar Association Establishes Standing Committee to Address Veterans, Military Affairs

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif.— On Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2015, the Orange County Bar Association (OCBA) Board of Directors voted to establish the OCBA Veterans & Military Committee in recognition of the important work done by servicemembers past and present and their significant contributions to society.

The Committee, which was born out of the Veterans & Military Task Force launched by 2015 OCBA President Ashleigh Aitken of Santa Ana, Calif.-based Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP, will benefit the OCBA membership and the broader legal community in their efforts to serve the more than 137,000 veterans currently residing in Orange County by serving as a platform for collaboration, training, and education in the arena of military and veterans affairs. As a strong regional hub for attorney activity and engagement with a proven track record of uniting various stakeholders to achieve common goals, the OCBA is uniquely situated to perform such a collaborative function by coordinating divergent efforts in a meaningful and synchronous way.

Under the leadership of Aitken as Chair and Vice Chair Major Dwight Stirling, co-founder and CEO of Veterans Legal Institute, the OCBA Veterans & Military Task Force has accomplished a great deal since its inception in January 2015. In July, the OCBA announced the launch of **veterans.ocbar.org**, a one-stop shop providing easy access to Orange County veterans in need of

legal information. Recognizing the unique challenges presented by life after military service, the website presents a robust collection of resources to aid veterans in securing the legal resources they need. Moreover, the Task Force's "Want to Help a Vet?" continuing legal education seminar series has encouraged civilian attorneys to represent military members and veterans on a pro bono basis while providing necessary training in military cultural competency, the navigation of the Veterans Affairs (VA) claims and appeals process, and an overview of discharge upgrade cases from intake to petition completion. Local attorneys are encouraged to attend the OCBA Veterans & Military Task Force's upcoming seminar on Veterans' Consumer Law Issues, which will be held at OCBA Headquarters in Newport Beach on Thursday, Dec. 3. Attendees will learn how to assist veterans to fight payday loans and debt collectors, manage student loans, and pursue for-profit schools for their unethical and predatory business practices. For more information or to register to attend, please visit www.ocbar.org.

Moving forward, the newly created OCBA Veterans & Military Committee will assist veterans across the board, providing a place for civil and criminal constituencies of the legal community to coordinate, collaborate, and interact. With an unemployment rate of 15 percent and a disproportionate number of veterans in the criminal justice system, access to justice is a pressing issue for this underserved population. By enabling pro bono legal service providers and the Orange County Veterans Treatment Court to work in tandem with law school clinics and law firms in the private sector, the OCBA Veterans & Military Committee will further the OCBA's mission of enhancing the system of justice, supporting the lawyers who serve it, and assisting the community served by it.

"I am incredibly proud of as well as humbled by the important work accomplished by the Veterans & Military Task Force in such a short period of time, and I am truly gratified by the Board's decision to establish a standing Veterans & Military Task Force Committee," states Aitken. "Working in conjunction with the OCBA Pro Bono and Education Committees, I am confident that the efforts

of the OCBA Veterans & Military Committee will provide the Orange County legal community with invaluable assistance in the quest to honor and serve the brave men and women who sacrifice so much on behalf of our nation.”

About the Orange County Bar Association

Established in 1901, the Orange County Bar Association is one of the largest voluntary bars in California. The mission of the Orange County Bar Association is to enhance the system of justice, to support the lawyers who serve it and to assist the community served by it.

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