



United States Department of Veterans Affairs Office of General Counsel Honors Program

The Honors Attorney Program in the Office of General Counsel at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs seeks outstanding law school graduates committed to public service. This program is designed to attract eligible individuals interested in a legal career with a federal agency practicing a wide array of legal fields, including government contracts law, real estate law, administrative law, labor/personnel law, and litigation. This program provides new attorneys with challenging legal work, professional development opportunities, and a chance to serve United States Veterans.

About VA

The Department of Veterans Affairs runs programs benefiting veterans and members of their families and includes three primary organizations, Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration. It offers education opportunities and rehabilitation services and provides compensation payments for disabilities or death related to military service, home loan guaranties, pensions, burials, and health care that includes the services of nursing homes, clinics, and medical centers. The VA's mission is to provide veterans the world-class benefits and services they have earned — and to do so by adhering to the highest standards of compassion, commitment, excellence, professionalism, integrity, accountability, and stewardship.

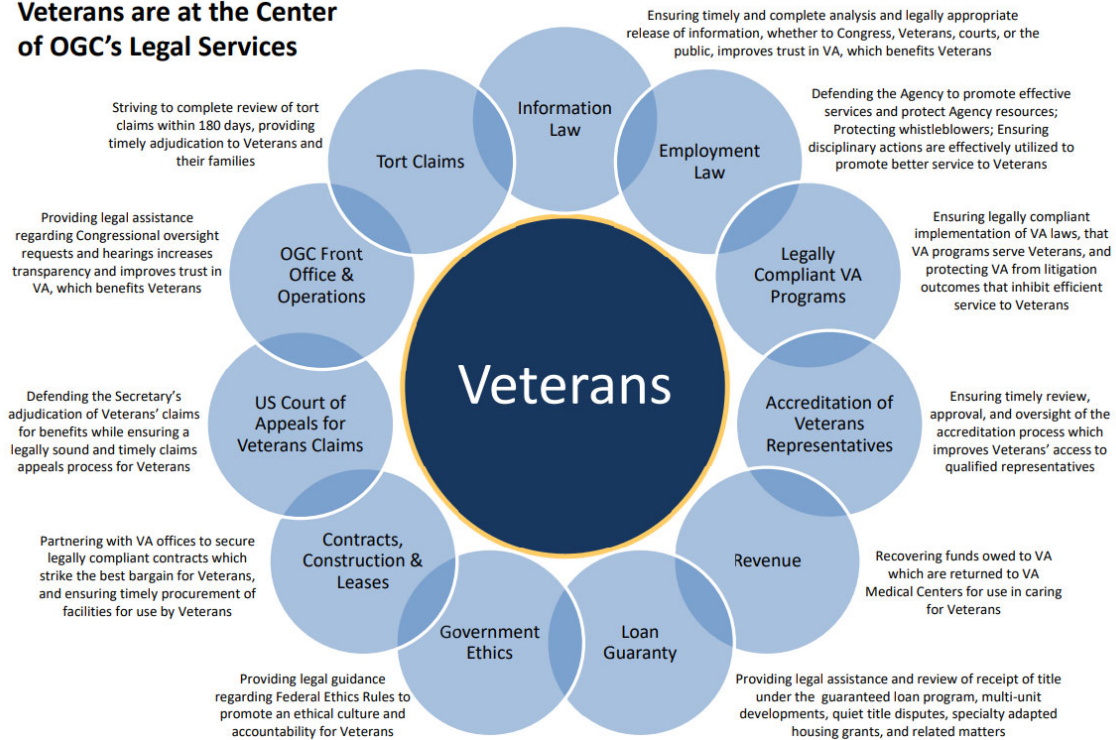
About OGC

The Office of General Counsel (OGC) identifies and meets the legal needs of the large and complex Department of Veterans Affairs. OGC is committed to providing the best legal service to those who are carrying out the promise to veterans made by Abraham Lincoln in his 2nd inaugural address of 1865: “To care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.” OGC's primary objective is to ensure the just and faithful execution of the laws, regulations, and policies that the Secretary has responsibility for administering, and by so doing enable the Department to accomplish its mission of service to our Nation's veterans.

OGC serves as VA's in-house counsel and is committed to ensuring that every member of OGC is focused on how OGC's work impacts veterans and has an understanding and commitment to the business priorities of VA clients, many of whom directly serve veterans. The General Counsel is, by statute, the Department's Chief Legal Officer. OGC attorneys also act as business partners, providing sound legal expertise, and as needed, critical problem-solving skills and risk-management advice.

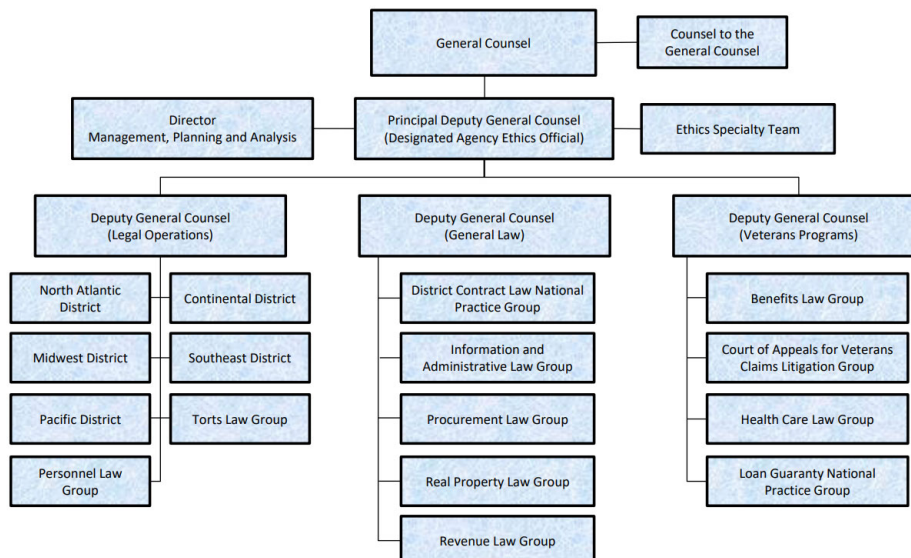
Additionally, OGC attorneys work with Congress to support VA's efforts to offer the best care for veterans. OGC attorneys provide technical assistance on legislative proposals, advise on pending legislation, and review Congressionally- mandated reports. For example, OGC has been providing legal support on up-and-coming issues delegated to the VA by the Mission Act (authorizing VA providers to use telehealth technologies to deliver care to Veterans' homes) and the PACT Act (expanding VA healthcare and benefits for Veterans exposed to toxic substances).

Veterans are at the Center of OGC's Legal Services



Agency Organization

OGC provides a full range of legal and litigation services, as well as support for legislative and regulatory activities through its Chief Counsels who lead eight Law Groups, five Offices of Chief Counsel in the Districts, two National Practice Groups, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Litigation Group, and the Ethics Specialty Team. OGC's internal administrative functions are handled by Management, Planning and Analysis. The VA employs 425,428 employees. OGC is comprised of approximately 850 employees.



Law Groups

General Law:

- **District Contract Law National Practice Group:** Provides legal advice, reviews, and litigation representation and support on matters pertaining to VA contracts, sharing agreements, and leases.
- **Information and Administrative Law Group:** Provides advice regarding information disclosure, electronically stored information disclosure, Touhy regulations, information security and technology, records and information management, data governance, Federal Advisory Committee, Copyright and Trademarks, Appropriations, Law Enforcement, and Legislative Counsel. Communications with Congress, appropriations law, law enforcement, and public-private partnerships.
- **Procurement Law Group:** Manages Government Supply and Service Contracts, Sharing Agreements (38 USC 8153), Bid Protest Litigation, Information Technology Contracts, and Debarment and Suspension.
- **Real Property Law Group:** Serves as full-service in-house and litigation counsel for Real Property matters (e.g., land acquisitions and disposals, medical facility leases, enhanced-use leases, easements, permits, and licenses); Personal Property matters (e.g., modular buildings, wheelchairs), Environmental Law; Energy and Utility Matters; Construction Matters; and Architect-Engineer Matters.
- **Revenue Law Group:** Provides legal services to recover money owed to VA and to help veterans maximize personal injury and workers comp recoveries. Recovers funds owed to the United States by various legal-collection remedies, and helps veterans maximize personal injury and workers comp recoveries.

Legal Operations:

- **Personnel Law Group:** Works with Human Resources (Titles 5 & 38), Labor Relations, Equal Employment Opportunity, Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Special Counsel (Whistleblower retaliation), and Immigration Law.
- **Torts Law Group:** Provides legal services to VA regarding Torts, e.g., medical malpractice, and Personal Immunity and assists with DOJ representation.

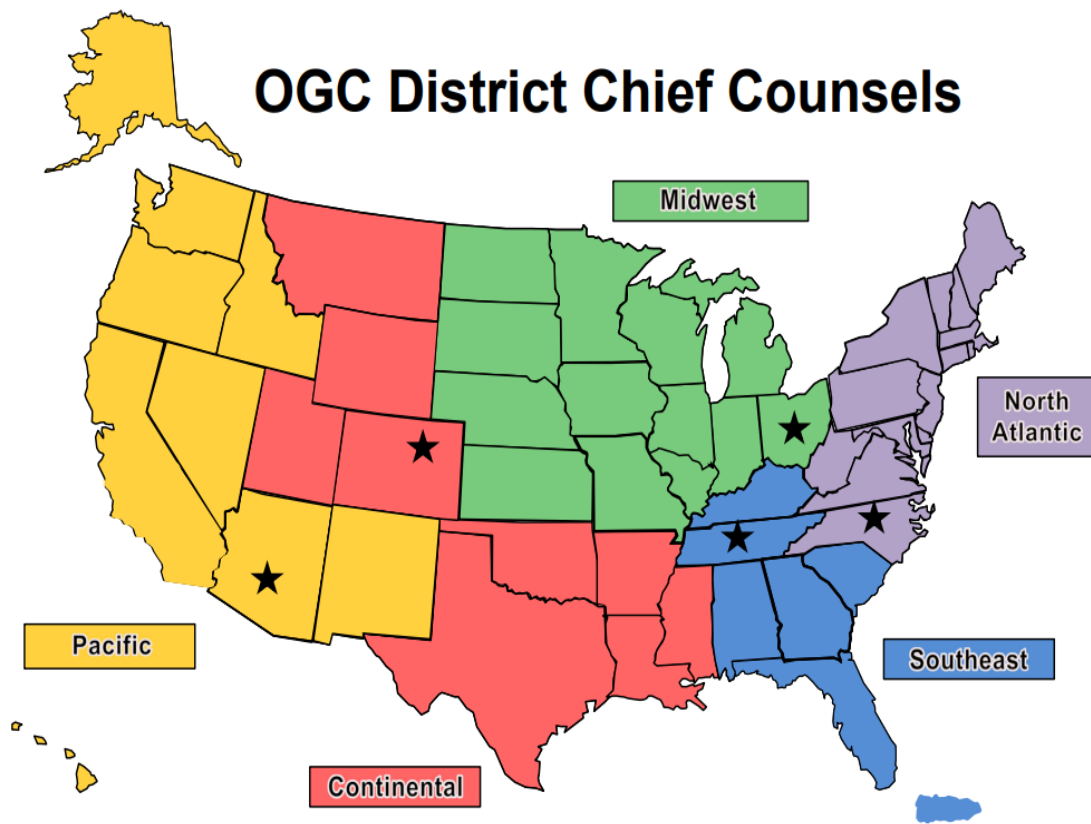
Veterans Programs:

- **Benefits Law Group:** Supports all Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Benefits, including Accreditation/Representation, Education and Vocational Rehabilitation, National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Issues (except Real Property), and Benefits Litigation at the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Helps VA administer \$100 billion in benefits annually to veterans, dependents, and survivors.
- **Health Care Law Group:** Assists Health Care Administration and Operations, including Eligibility for Care, Homeless Programs, Veterans Canteen Service, Patents, Medical Research, and Non-Profit Research Corporations.
- **Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Litigation Group:** The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Litigation Group represents the Secretary in all litigation brought before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.
- **Loan Guaranty National Practice Group:** Provides necessary legal services in connection with the activities of VBA's Loan Guaranty Program.

Ethics Specialty Team:

- OGC’s Ethics Specialty Team (EST) manages the Department’s Ethics Program. The Principal Deputy General Counsel for General Law serves as VA’s Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO). Clients contact the EST directly for advice on ethics issues.

OGC also has regional offices in the following districts: Continental District, Midwest District, North Atlantic District, Pacific District, Southeast District. These offices provide direct advice and representation to VA entities – to include medical centers, regional benefits offices, and VA Cemeteries - within their respective districts.



★ = Physical Location of Sitting Chief Counsel

Honors Program

The OGC Honors Program seeks eligible individuals interested in an intellectually stimulating career serving United States veterans. The program will select a limited number of applicants to begin working in Summer or Fall of 2025. OGC will designate the number and location of positions based on current agency needs. Honors attorneys will gain valuable experience in the Federal sector and benefit from OGC training in a wide variety of subject matter areas.

Eligibility:

- 3Ls in law school, recent graduates, current law clerks, other fellowships.
- Only U.S. citizens are eligible for employment in the Honors Attorney Program.
- Highly qualified third-year law students expected to be awarded a J.D. prior to July of the next year (or fourth-year students graduating from four-year programs, combination programs, or LL.M. programs immediately after law school from accredited schools) are eligible.
- Federal or state judicial law clerks with no more than two years of clerkship experience prior to the start date for the Honors Attorney Program are eligible.
- Eligibility is limited to graduating law students and recent law school graduates who entered judicial clerkships, graduate law programs, or qualifying legal fellowships within 9 months of law school graduation.

Selection Criteria:

- Demonstrated academic excellence
- Top third of law school class
- Extra-curricular activities (law school journal, moot court, participation in bar/law student organizations)
- Internship experience
- Commitment to public service

Compensation and Benefits:

- Individuals hired into a position within one year of graduation from law school are hired at the GS-11 pay grade. Attorneys hired following judicial clerkships may be considered for a GS-12 pay grade depending on the duration of the clerkship.
- Individuals may be eligible for Public Service Loan Forgiveness ([Link](#))
- Individuals will receive federal employee benefits to include:
 - Annual and Sick Leave
 - Federal Employee Health Benefits
 - Federal Employee Life Insurance Program
 - Participation in Federal Employee Retirement System
 - Participation in Thrift Savings Plan

Application Process:

- The application period begins January 20, 2025, and closes by 11:59 pm EST on February 18, 2025.
- Applications must be submitted via email to OGCHonorsProgram@va.gov. For email submissions Subject line must include “Honors Attorney Program.”
- Applications materials must be combined as a single PDF and must include:
 1. Cover letter – no more than one page
 2. Resume
 3. Law School Transcript
 4. Writing Sample – no less than 5 pages and no more than 10 pages. The writing sample must be substantially the work of the candidate.
 5. References
 - No more than three reference
 - At least one reference should be from a member of the law school staff or a current or former employer
- Selected applicants will be invited for interviews that may take place any time between March to April of 2025.
- Offers will be extended on a rolling basis from March to April of 2025.

Honors Program Attorney’s Experience

Grace Payne

Grace is a Staff Attorney and prior Honors Attorney with the Real Property Law Group (RPLG), working primarily on leasing, land use, and related litigation.

Grace comes to OGC from American University’s Washington College of Law in Washington, D.C., where she currently lives with her husband and two daughters. While at law school, she was the Articles Editor for the Administrative Law Review, and during summers worked for World Hope International and the Transactional Law Clinic Collaborative. She learned about OGC’s Honors Program as part of her job search after completing clerkships for federal magistrate judges at both the District of Maryland and the District of DC Federal Courts. Long interested in public service, Grace decided to pursue law instead of teaching, as she increasingly enjoyed honing her advocacy and writing skills while an undergrad.



One of the things that most impressed Grace is the sense of mission that flows throughout the VA and OGC. That, and the collegiality surrounding her, have made working at OGC part of her long-term career plan. She can see herself in ten years in a position of increasing experience and responsibility, where she can contribute in a meaningful way to OGC’s culture and output.

Emmagrace McEvoy-Etienne



Emmagrace is an Attorney-Advisor and prior Honors Attorney with the Real Property Law Group (RPLG), working on leasing, land use, and construction matters.

Emmagrace comes to OGC from Drexel University Thomas R. Kline School of Law. Prior to law school, Emmagrace worked as an art teacher in the Philadelphia and a Paralegal at White and Williams LLP. During law school, Emmagrace continued working as a paralegal, as well as interning with the School District of Philadelphia's Office of General Counsel and the Lanett Company. During law school, Emmagrace also participated in the

Marshall Brennan Constitutional Literacy Program and completed pro bono work with the Homeless Advocacy Project. Emmagrace has always been drawn to public service and decided to attend law school to have a greater impact on vulnerable populations than she was able to provide as a teacher.

One of the things that has impressed Emmagrace since starting with RPLG is how many opportunities she has been given from the range of matters to the independence on completing assignments. Everyone in RPLG has been extremely encouraging and welcoming which has helped build Emmagrace's confidence as an attorney.