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OVERVIEW

The General Counsel provides legal advice and services to the Secretary (SECVA) and all organizational components of the Department. The General Counsel is, by statute, the Department’s Chief Legal Officer.
OGC’s Mission

• The Office of General Counsel (OGC) serves as VA’s in-house counsel and is committed to ensuring that every member of our organization has a Veteran focus and an understanding and commitment to the business priorities of our VA clients.

• OGC’s attorneys act as business partners, providing sound legal expertise, and as needed, critical problem-solving skills and risk-management advice.

• OGC strives to provide real-time legal advice. Our goal is to be involved with Department decision-makers (our clients) during the initial phases of decisions and actions, rather than focusing only on defending actions after the decisions have been made. This proactive, preventive approach promotes better outcomes and reduces risk.
OGC focuses its operations on benefitting Veterans

**US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC)**
- Ensuring a legally sound claims appeals process for Veterans; defending the Secretary’s adjudication of Veterans’ claims for compensation and other benefits; adequate resourcing ensures claims are not backlogged at the appellate stage.

**Contracts, Construction & Leases**
- Partnering with VA offices to secure legally compliant contracts which strike the best bargain for Veterans, and ensuring timely procurement of facilities for use by Veterans.

**Representing VA at EEOC, MSPB, Arbitrations**
- Defending the Agency promotes just results and protects Agency resources; protecting whistleblowers; ensuring disciplinary actions are sound, and defending them on appeal, to promote better service to Veterans.

**Loan Guaranty**
- Legal assistance and review of receipt of title under the guaranteed loan program, multi-unit developments, quiet title disputes, specialty adapted housing grants, and other loan guaranty matters.

**Tort Claims**
- Adjudication of tort claims filed by Veterans or their families.

**Accreditation of Veterans Representatives**
- Ensuring timely review, approval, and oversight of the accreditation process which improves Veterans’ access to qualified representatives.

**Information Law**
- Ensuring timely and complete analysis and legally appropriate release of information, whether to Congress, Veterans, courts, or the public, improves trust in VA, which benefits Veterans.

**OGC Front Office & Operations**
- Ensuring the day-to-day operations of OGC, including HR, Budget, FOIA, Strategic Planning, Analytics, Training, and Employee Development.

**Recovery of Funds**
- Recovering funds owed to VA which are returned to VA Medical Centers for use in caring for Veterans.

**Government Ethics**
- Legal assistance and guidance regarding compliance with Federal Ethics Rules.

**Legally Compliant VA programs**
- Ensuring legally compliant implementation of new laws (e.g. Choice Act) and that VA programs carry out intended purpose of serving Veterans, and protecting VA from litigation outcomes that are costly or inhibit efficient provision of service to Veterans.
OGC’s Structure

• The General Counsel, Principal Deputy General Counsel, Deputy General Counsel Legal Operations, Deputy General Counsel General Law and Senior Counsel to the General Counsel advise the SECVA, Deputy Secretary (DEPSECVA), VA Chief of Staff (COSVA), and other senior Department officials regarding all laws, regulations, Executive Orders, and judicial precedents pertaining to the Department.

• OGC provides a full range of legal and litigation services, as well as support for legislative and regulatory activities through our Chief Counsels who lead eight VA Central Office (VACO)-based Law Groups, two National Practice Groups (NPGs), five Offices of Chief Counsel in the Districts, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Litigation Group, and the Ethics Specialty Team (EST).
Office of General Counsel

LEADERSHIP
OGC Leadership

General Counsel
James M. Byrne

Principal Deputy General Counsel
Richard J. Hipolit
OGC Leadership

Deputy General Counsel Legal Operations
D. Brent Pope

Deputy General Counsel General Law
Michael R. Hogan

Senior Counsel to the General Counsel
Catherine C. Mitrano
OGC Leadership and Law Groups are located in VA Central Office.

810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

OGC’s internal administrative functions are led by the Director, Management, Planning & Analysis (MPA).
Office of General Counsel

LAW GROUPS
Law Groups

OGC’s Law Groups are based in VA Central Office. Each Law Group is led by a senior executive Chief Counsel. Law Group attorneys typically possess expertise in specific subject-matter areas and provide specific legal advice to program officials, review proposed regulations and directives, and handle litigation involving VA programs.

- **Benefits Law Group** - 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.

- **Health Care Law Group** - Health Care Administration and Operations, including Eligibility for Care, Homeless Programs, Veterans Canteen Service, Patents, Medical Research, and Non-Profit Research Corporations.

- **Revenue Law Group** - Recovers funds owed to the United States by various legal-collection remedies, to include litigation in Federal and State courts.
Law Groups (continued)


- **Personnel Law Group** - Human Resources (Title 5 & 38), Labor Relations, Equal Employment Opportunity, Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Special Counsel (Whistleblower retaliation), and Immigration Law.

- **Procurement Law Group** - Government Supply and Service Contracts, Sharing Agreements (38 USC 8153), Bid Protest Litigation, Information Technology Contracts, and Debarment and Suspension.


- **Torts Law Group** - Torts, Personal Immunity and DOJ Representation.
U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Litigation Group

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Litigation Group represents the SECVA in all litigation brought before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC).
Office of General Counsel

OFFICES OF CHIEF COUNSEL IN THE DISTRICTS
Offices of Chief Counsel in the Districts

There is one Chief Counsel office in each VA District, each office is led by a senior executive Chief Counsel. Each Chief Counsel is responsible for providing legal advice and assistance to Directors and other officials of all designated VA facilities within a District. The Chief Counsels fulfill these functions by performing the following tasks:

• Advise and represent management of VA facilities on issues relating to personnel and labor law.
• Provide other legal services and consultation as needed.
Office of General Counsel

NATIONAL PRACTICE GROUPS
National Practice Groups

OGC’s National Practice Groups (NPGs) provide consolidated legal services to clients in a specific practice area. Clients with needs in these areas contact the applicable NPG directly for legal services.

- **District Contracting National Practice Group** - Provide legal advice, reviews, and litigation representation and support on matters pertaining to VA contracts, sharing agreements, and leases arising outside of VACO.

- **Loan Guaranty National Practice Group** - Provide necessary legal services in connection with the activities of VBA’s Loan Guaranty Program.
Office of General Counsel

ETHICS SPECIALTY TEAM (EST)
Ethics Specialty Team

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

Office of General Counsel
Questions about externships or employment opportunities?
Email: OGCMPAKM@va.gov