

# Legal assistance officer on board NAS June 14-25

The nearest Navy Legal Assistance Office (NLSO), offering a full range of legal services to active-duty, retirees and their dependents is located in Gulfport. But that is a 178-mile, three-hour voyage. Most people dread seeing a lawyer. So asking them to embark on a three-hour tour is a tall order.

Military members at NAS Meridian will no longer have to make the long trip to Gulfport to receive legal guidance from an attorney.

A JAG officer from the Navy Reserve will provide legal assistance at NAS Meridian from June 14-25.

Get a will, a medical directive, and a power of attorney. Or consult with an attorney about family issues, consumer issues, military issues, etc.

Legal assistance does not include what is called "PERSREP." PERSREP broadly includes all issues or questions regarding military discipline, such as NJPs, Administrative Separations and Boards of Inquiry. Typical examples of PERSREP include: "I'm under investigation for X," "I'm being kicked out of the Navy for Y," "I've been notified my command is going to take me to court martial," "My advancement to the next rank has been suspended," or "My security clearance is under review." Whenever Sailors need PERSREP advice regarding such issues, they should

call the Gulfport Legal Service Office directly, and an attorney there will conduct the appointment over the phone.

Under a previous trial program, the Staff Judge Advocate (SJA) for NAS Meridian attempted to serve as both the base lawyer, representing the U.S. Navy's interests, and a myriad of clients. But the SJA's charter to perform legal assistance, thus "wearing two hats," ended in October 2009.

Resource constraints, such as time and money, and other conflicts, pose serious challenges for a SJA attempting to provide legal assistance.

"The primary duty of the staff judge advocate is to provide accurate and timely legal advice to the commanding officer," said Lt. Darrin MacKinnon.

"That is a full-time job. Virtually every issue on the installation has a legal angle -- military justice, law enforcement, security, administrative law, contract law, employee and servicemember rights, ethics -- you name it."

To receive competent legal advice and resolution to an issue, the average legal assistance client requires an attorney to invest anywhere from three to five hours of time. And many cases take weeks or months to resolve. Attorneys possess a professional and ethical

requirement of competence and diligence -- to take a case from 'cradle to grave.'

"The nemesis of a lawyer's existence is the proverbial 'quick question,'" MacKinnon said. "Although I understand the frustration, a lawyer who begins fielding 'quick questions' in a good-spirited attempt to be helpful will soon get henpecked and compromise his ethical duties. Legal assistance should be a full-time professional service, provided behind closed doors, deliberately and in confidence, not a 'drive-through' service. That is why legal assistance has come to NAS Meridian."

Lt. Cmdr. Jason Ayeroff, head of NLSO Gulfport, plans to send a legal assistance attorney to NAS Meridian for two days each month. The legal assistance attorney will meet with clients in the Legal Office (Administration Building 255, Suite 222) for a 30-minute intake appointment and to assist with wills, powers of attorney, health-care directives, state tax exemptions, and family or consumer law issues.

To make an appointment with NAS Meridian Legal, call (601) 679-2340. Legal assistance is available to active duty military, retirees and their dependents.