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Johnathan Silva

**Lone Star Legal Aid
Houston, TX**

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SIX-MONTH FELLOWSHIP UPDATE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Johnathan represents veterans who are denied the full benefits that their service and/or level of service-related injury merit.

NEED ADDRESSED BY PROJECT

The backlog in the processing of veterans' benefits claims is well-documented. The pressures to reduce the backlog contributes to error rates in claims across the country as well as errors in assessing medical conditions that leave veterans with reduced levels of benefits. There are too many veterans with disability awards that understate the level of injury and loss of function. Johnathan's project advocates on behalf of those veterans to ensure that they receive the correct benefits they have earned and deserve.

HIGHLIGHTS TO DATE

In the first six months, Johnathan has:

- Created a veterans benefits-specific intake sheet that helps easily identify the VA benefit the veteran seeks to obtain and the eligibility requirements for that benefit
- Implemented and staffed two weekly veterans legal clinics and two monthly veterans outreach events that generate veterans benefits issues within his project's target area
- Represented two veterans before a Decision Review Officer Administrative Hearing appealing the VA's initial benefits determination
- Given a presentation regarding legal issues facing veterans and veteran family members at a CLE event

WHAT'S NEXT

In the next six months, Johnathan has plans to:

- Expand direct representation to ten veterans with veterans' benefits issues
- Continue giving presentations regarding legal issues facing veterans and veteran family members to inform more advocates of these issues and ways to help resolve them
- Work with Lone Star Legal Aid's Managing Attorney to create an in-house CLE event to have more attorneys obtain VA accreditation.