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Steve Berman, the American Bankruptcy Institute, and Stetson Law Students Craft First of its Kind Program to Aid Active Duty Service Members and Veterans Facing Financial Insolvency

TAMPA, FL – Tampa Partner Steve Berman, the American Bankruptcy Institute's (ABI) Veterans Task Force, and Stetson Law students have crafted a program to assist active duty service members and veterans facing financial insolvency. Appointed to the ABI's Veterans Task Force in December 2020, Steve has worked to train military legal officers and to establish a pipeline of volunteers with expertise to assist active duty service members and veterans to address financial insolvency and the far-reaching consequences it can have. Though it's a complicated area of the law, one that's not particularly intuitive, Steve and the Stetson 3L students worked to create enough written materials to support three to four hours' worth of programming for military legal officers.

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Identified as a leading cause of veteran suicides, financial insolvency can place a seemingly insurmountable

strain on members of the military. While Judge Advocate Generals (JAG) officers have extensive legal training, there are no required curricula related to financial literacy. With the number of veterans experiencing insolvency and its effects on everything from everyday work to obtaining security clearances, Steve saw an opportunity to educate military legal officers on laws relating to consumer finance, bankruptcy, and potential avenues for relief and to establish a network of insolvency professionals ready to assist.

"There are lots of options and we wanted legal officers to understand and be able to identify the issues attendant to financial distress and have the tools to refer active duty service members and veterans in need to competent insolvency professionals," Steve said.

To complete the program's curriculum, Steve traveled to Washington, D.C. to moderate a panel presentation by United States Bankruptcy Judges Mary Heston, Christopher Klein, and Michael Williamson. The discussion was recorded and will be available to Navy JAG officers, as will the supporting written materials. The Army and Air Force have also requested the presentation and supporting materials.

"Financial distress can be emotionally debilitating and also can affect an individual service member's day-to-day work, especially if someone doesn't know how to get out of a seemingly hopeless situation," Steve said. "We saw the need and believe it will be impactful on a likely large unaddressed need for legal support for our military members."

Steve has focused his practice as a business bankruptcy litigator representing creditors, distressed debt lenders, trustees, committees, and business entities litigating disputes in bankruptcy court. Steve is board certified by the American Board of Certification in both creditors' rights law and business bankruptcy law and is a member of the Florida, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, New York, and California Bars. Steve serves on the Board of Directors for the American Bankruptcy Institute and the American Board of Certification.