# POSITION DESCRIPTION

**General Counsel, Department of Veterans Affairs**

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| **OVERVIEW** |
| Senate Committee | Veterans’ Affairs |
| Agency Mission | To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s veterans. |
| Position Overview | The General Counsel is the chief legal officer of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and is the final legal authority within the department. General Counsel serves as the principal advisor to the Secretary on legal matters, and provides leadership and direction for the Office of General Counsel (OGC), a major staff office of VA. The General Counsel is responsible for the interpretation of all laws affecting veterans and the department; the review of all regulations, executive orders, proclamations and policies implementing these laws; and for advising and assisting VA officials in taking appropriate legal or preventive actions in matters involving threatened violence, suspected crimes or protection of government personnel or property. |
| Compensation | Level IV $155,500 (5 U.S.C. § 5315)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Secretary of Veterans Affairs |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | The VA is the second-largest federal department and employs more than 340,000 individuals in a nationwide network of 144 medical centers, 1,203 community-based outpatient clinics, 300 vet centers and 56 regional offices. The VA also oversees a network of cemeteries, 131 of them national and 90 of them state or tribal. The VA administers its work through three major organizations: the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration and the National Cemetery Administration Services. The Department of Veterans Affairs’ budget for fiscal 2018 is over $185 billion. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Advises the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Chief of Staff and other senior department officials regarding all laws, regulations, executive orders and judicial precedents pertaining to the department
* Provides legal advice and guidance to the secretary on draft bills and on testimony for presentation to Congress
* Accompanies the Secretary and other senior department officials when testifying before Congress
* Advises the Secretary on department matters being litigated before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, and all other state and federal courts or administrative bodies
* Administers claims arising under the Federal Tort Claims Act
* Handles legal issues arising from personnel matters
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Knowledge of joint VA-Department of Defense veteran-related programs and collaborations, as well as the Department of Defense’s TRICARE health care program
* Knowledge and understanding of VA health care and benefit programs
* Relationships with and/or understanding of the mission and goals of major national veteran service organizations and national military service organizations
* Veteran status (preferred)
* Basic understanding of VA’s interaction with Congress
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| Competencies | * Strong interpersonal skills; ability to listen to others’ perspectives and ideas and work well across the organization/partner with senior leaders at the VA
* A non-adversarial approach
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| **CURRENT AND PAST APPOINTEES** |
| James Byrne (2017 – Present): Associate General Counsel and Chief Privacy Officer, Lockheed Martin Corporation; Senior Executive Service Deputy Special Counsel, Office of the United States Special Counsel; General Counsel and Assistant Inspector General for Investigations, Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction; Infantry Officer, United States Marine Corps |
| Leigh A. Bradley (December 2014 – 2017): Director, Department of Defense Standards of Conduct Office; Principal Deputy General Counsel, Department of the Navy; Chief Risk Officer, American Red Cross; Partner, Holland & Knight LLP |
| Will A. Gunn (June 2009 – July 2014): Principal, The Gunn Law Firm; President & Chief Executive Officer, Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Washington; Chief Defense Counsel, U.S. Air Force; Executive Officer to the Judge Advocate General, U.S. Air Force |
| Paul J. Hutter (October 2006 – November 2008): Acting Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning, Department of Veterans Affairs; Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs; Chief Operating Officer, Coalition Provisional Authority (Department of Defense team to transition the interim government in Iraq); Colonel, Army Reserves |

# Endnotes

This position description was created with the help of Heidrick & Struggles, a global executive search firm.

1. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials at 2013 levels during calendar year 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)