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Welcome to the opening of the first Veterans Court in Delaware

A lot of very interested and dedicated people have partnered to establish this very meaningful and important project. We believe that there is a need for a therapeutic approach to criminal prosecution of our veterans in Delaware. As some of you are aware hundreds of veterans are charged with non-violent felony and misdemeanor crimes within Delaware. Many of these veterans have medical, mental health, and substance abuse issues and often need rehabilitative services that are not otherwise available to them except through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Kent County Superior Court of Delaware has agreed to establish a Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) in Dover to work with the VA to divert select members of this veteran population who are charged with non-violent felony and misdemeanor crimes away from jail and into appropriate rehabilitative programs. The VTC will operate as a part of the existing Kent County Superior Court of Delaware Treatment program.

The potential value has already been recognized in other jurisdictions, starting with the very first VTC in Buffalo, NY. The recidivism rate is under 20%

The mission driving the Veterans Treatment Court is to successfully habilitate veterans by diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system and providing them with the tools they need in order to lead a productive and law abiding lifestyle. In hopes of achieving this goal, the program provides veterans suffering from substance abuse issues, alcoholism, mental health issues, and emotional disabilities with treatment, academic and vocational training, job skills, and placement services. The program provides further ancillary services to meet the distinctive needs of each individual participant, such as housing transportation, medical, dental, and other supportive services.

A few stats: The VA notes that in 2009, 1.16 million of all adults arrested or nearly 10% served in the military. As many as one third of the adult homeless population has served in the military and, at any given time as many as 130,000 are homeless. A recent Bureau of Justice statistic report found that the veteran prison population has about 45% suffering from mental illness, with 81% with a substance abuse problem prior to incarceration.

We propose a team approach for our eligible candidates; a veteran will be eligible to enter if he or she has committed a non-violent crime, subject to probation. There may be cases outside the VA eligibility requirements and that is why we have both a VA Treatment Coordinator and TASC (from the Delaware Division of Health & Social Services) teamed up. We also have Mentor Coordinator, John McDonald who will team the vet with a fellow vet to help make his appointments and assist. One-on-one mentoring is key. We hope to have vets from the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Shield, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom volunteer as mentors, to listen, coach and help our vets set and reach their goal. The environment is therapeutic, but accountability is required. Veterans in the program must attend regular status hearings, participate in the development of their treatment plans, and engage in community groups as required by their treatment. After completion, which

will generally take up to a year (we want them stable and sober), prosecution for the offense will not proceed, and the charges against the vet will be dismissed.

Other requirements:

1. Sign a voluntary petition, waiver and agreement
2. Waive important constitutional rights to enter and take advantage of the program.
3. Facts in the police reports are stipulated as accurate for the purpose of these proceedings, and in the event of termination.
4. Regular meetings in court, and sanctions could occur.
5. Other requirements standard for diversion courts, such as no violations of the law, attend programs and work or school, etc., appear in court pay a civil education fund assessment to the clerk of the court. - \$200.

We also hope to allow participants generated through our Federal Court System to enter as well. In addition, Court of Common Pleas proposes to establish a misdemeanor VTC as well.

(Open to any comments.)

Vet Facts:

1. 70% finish the programs and 75% are not rearrested for at least two years after, according to the NADCP.
2. None of J Russell's 41 graduates has been rearrested. Only 25 of the 181 total veterans admitted to his program have dropped out before graduation.
3. There will be increased numbers seeking VA mental health treatment from over 10 years of war.
4. 2008 Rand study found that almost 19% of Iraq and Afghanistan vets were reporting symptoms of PTSD or major depression.
5. Studies show that such collaborative courts enhance public safety, cut recidivism and are more cost effective than the typical manner of processing offenders.
6. Mentors are key:
 - a. They can relate
 - b. They can be a friend
 - c. They don't officially represent the court
 - d. They can remind them of the military pride.

See: <http://www.nadcp.org/learn/veterans-treatment-court-clearinghouse>