



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Anne E. Minihan
Administrative Judge
Ninth Judicial District**

**Contact:
Lucian Chalfen,
Public Information Director
Arlene Hackel, Deputy Director
(212) 428-2500**

www.nycourts.gov/press

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Veterans Treatment Court Opens in Putnam County

CARMEL, NEW YORK—Ninth Judicial District Administrative Judge Anne E. Minihan today announced the opening of the Putnam County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC), a specialized court targeting justice-involved veterans charged with felonies who may be suffering from addiction, mental health issues and other combat-related disorders. The new court, located in the Putnam Supreme and County Courthouse, is a partnership of the Ninth Judicial District, the Putnam County District Attorney's Office, the local defense bar, the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration and local services providers, among others. The court system's Office of Justice Initiatives' Division of Policy and Planning, led by Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina G. Richardson-Mendelson, has been involved throughout the planning and implementation of the new VTC.

Veterans Treatment Courts divert appropriate cases of justice-involved veterans, offering substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment and other customized services as an alternative to conventional prosecution and incarceration. These problem-solving courts work collaboratively with the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (VA), the VA's Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, veteran peer mentors, veteran services providers, probation and other organizations and agencies to effectively address both the unique needs of justice-involved veterans and the public safety concerns of the community. Key features of the VTC model include rigorous treatment services, intensive judicial monitoring and coordination among the various

stakeholders. Additionally, an important component in ensuring participants' success is the use of peer mentors, military veterans who volunteer their time to offer support and motivation to help justice-involved veterans re-adjust to civilian life.

Veterans who are not considered a public safety threat and are willing to comply with court-imposed conditions will be considered for participation in the new Putnam County VTC. Referrals for the VTC can be made by town and village magistrates, defense counsel, prosecutors, clinicians, probation, veteran service agencies and other sources. All referrals will be vetted by the Putnam District Attorney's Office and the respective defense attorney. The point of contact for VTC referrals is Sue Fitzgerald, VTC Coordinator. The court will hear felony and misdemeanor cases. Veterans will be assessed to determine eligibility for substance abuse, healthcare, housing and other services and benefits. Participants may have their charges reduced or dismissed upon successful completion of treatment and other court requirements.

Hon. Joseph Spofford will preside over the new Putnam County Veterans Treatment Court. Judge Spofford, who also presides over the County's Drug Treatment Court, is familiar with problem-solving court approaches. "Putnam County Court is proud and honored to provide a Veteran's Treatment Court to those men and women who have served our nation in the armed services. To those veterans who are suffering from substance abuse issues, PTSD and other related ailments, our court will provide the services and resources that you have earned and are entitled to. We recognize, appreciate and are thankful for the service and sacrifices that each of you have made to protect and ensure our freedom. This court is committed to providing our veterans with all resources available to provide for their recovery," said Judge Spofford.

"It is an honor to be a partner in bringing a Veterans Treatment Court to Putnam County so that we may have the opportunity to serve those who have served our beautiful country and have found themselves involved in the criminal justice system. By combining the traditional community services available through all our treatment courts with resources specifically developed to address the unique needs that arise from military service, we can avoid outcomes that result in the incarceration of veterans who struggle with mental health and/or substance abuse problems," said Judge Minihan.

"The new Putnam County Veterans Treatment Court will address the root causes of criminal behavior, responding to the special needs of the County's justice-involved veterans, helping them to reintegrate as civilians and lead law-abiding lives. I am thankful to the Ninth Judicial District, the Putnam County District Attorney's Office and our other justice system partners for their collective efforts in expanding the successful VTC model in New York State," said Judge Richardson-Mendelson.

“Most veterans have an ingrained mentality where they learn to hide emotional and physical injuries. We are grateful to the peer veteran mentors who will support, motivate and help the justice-involved veterans navigate the court’s requirements. This VTC is going to help a lot of justice-involved veterans transition to civilian life,” said Judge Toko Serita, Statewide Coordinating Judge for Problem-Solving Courts.

“The Putnam County District Attorney’s Office is honored to be a part of a program that affords our veterans the specialized attention and resources necessary to address service-related ailments as an alternative to traditional criminal prosecution. We are humbled and privileged at the opportunity to help those who have sacrificed so much, including their sobriety and mental health, for our freedoms. My office is fully committed to maintaining an active, productive role in the lives of our veterans along their journey of hope, self-appreciation and recovery,” said District Attorney Robert Tendy.

“We are excited that our clients involved in the criminal justice system here in Putnam County, who have served our country in the armed services, will be offered support and services designed to assist them with their challenges, rather than incarceration,” said Sandra Fusco, Chief Attorney, Putnam County Legal Aid Society.

“Putnam County has always been a great county for veterans. As we try to expand services available for veterans in the county, the Veteran Treatment Court will be an asset,” said Karl Rohde, Director of the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency.

The country’s first VTC was launched in Buffalo, New York in 2008 and has since become a national model. With the launch of the Putnam County VTC, there are now 37 Veterans Treatment Courts operating in 26 New York counties encompassing urban, suburban and rural communities. Additionally, more Veterans Treatment Courts are in the planning stages. For more information about New York’s Veterans Treatment Courts and other problem-solving courts, visit:

https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/problem_solving/.

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