



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Second Veterans Treatment Court Opens in Dutchess County

BEACON, NEW YORK—Ninth Judicial District Administrative Judge Anne E. Minihan today announced the opening of a second Veterans Treatment Court in Dutchess County. The Beacon City Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) is a specialized court that provides a non-adversarial approach to justice-involved veterans charged with misdemeanors who may be suffering from addiction or mental health issues related to military service. The new court will recognize veterans from all branches of the U.S. military services, including active service members, reservists and the national guard and will consider veterans with all types of military discharges. Veterans may have their charges reduced or dismissed upon successful completion of treatment and other court requirements.

Located in the Beacon City Courthouse, the court is a partnership of the Ninth Judicial District, the Dutchess County District Attorney's Office and several Dutchess County agencies, including the Public Defender's Office, Probation and Community Corrections, the Division of Veterans Services, and Behavioral & Community Health, as well as the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (VA) and Mental Health America of Dutchess County's Vet2Vet program, among others. The court system's Office for Justice Initiatives' Division of Policy and Planning, led by Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina Richardson-Mendelson and Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinating Judge Toko Serita, has been involved throughout the planning and implementation of the new VTC.

Veterans Treatment Courts divert qualifying cases of justice-involved veterans, offering substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment and other customized services as an alternative to conventional prosecution and incarceration. They work collaboratively with the VA, the VA's Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, volunteer peer veteran mentors, veteran services providers, Dutchess County probation and other 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 tailored clinical treatment services, intensive judicial monitoring and assistance with benefits, housing, education and employment, all coordinated with various community stakeholders. Additionally, an important component in ensuring veterans' success is the use of peer mentors, military veterans who volunteer their time to offer support, encouragement and motivation to help justice-involved veterans re-adjust to civilian life.

"It is an honor to partner in bringing another Veterans Treatment Court to Dutchess County so that we may have the opportunity to serve those who have served our country. By combining the traditional community services available through all our treatment courts with services that have been 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.

Hon. Gregory Johnston, who presides over Beacon's Recovery Court and Domestic Violence Court—and is very familiar with interdisciplinary approaches to address substance use disorders, mental health challenges and issues regarding involving intimate partners—will preside over the Beacon City Veterans Treatment Court.

"I am gratified to see Beacon Recovery Court expanded to focus on those who have served our country. It is particularly valuable that the veteran participants are paired with a peer mentor who is well suited to understand their unique background," said Judge Johnston.

Judge Edwina Richardson-Mendelson said, "Veterans Treatment Courts are so important to the fabric of our justice system. I congratulate the Dutchess County community for coming together to build this court and applaud Judges Minihan and Johnston for their leadership. I also extend my gratitude to the incredible peer mentors whose military experience and dedication will surely be crucial to the court's success."

"So many of our veterans suffer from a substance abuse and/or mental health disorder. VTC judges and coordinators make sure they receive the treatment they need and deserve. Treatment courts are all about forming local, sustainable community collaboratives, and the Ninth Judicial District has gone above and beyond in this regard by building the infrastructure needed to serve New York's justice-involved veteran population throughout the Hudson Valley," said Judge Serita.

Dutchess County Public Defender Tom Angell said, "These veterans courts are a prime example of the successful collaboration of agencies and experts within the criminal justice system coming together to continuously improve system outcomes in Dutchess County. The first VTC in Dutchess County opened in May 2022 in the City of Poughkeepsie and has become a valuable resource for helping our veteran clients, offering treatments and alternatives to incarceration to help them achieve successful rehabilitation."

“The District Attorney’s Office fully supports the creation of a Veteran’s Treatment Court for the men and women who have stood in service of our country. This court is designed to offer solutions to those veterans who become involved in the criminal justice system by making the appropriate services available within a supervised setting. We believe this holistic approach will best serve our veterans and provide a chance at rehabilitation while balancing the rights and needs of the victim. The supervised setting will maintain the ability to use appropriate sanctions if necessary. It is our belief that this is a balanced and fair way to individually assess and adjudicate all cases including those involving our veterans,” said Dutchess County District Attorney William V Grady.

The country’s first VTC was launched in Buffalo, New York in 2008 and has since served as a national model. With the launch of the Beacon City VTC, there are now 37 Veterans Treatment Courts operating in 26 New York counties encompassing urban, suburban and rural communities. There are currently more Veterans Treatment Courts 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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