

**Veterans Treatment Court
Media Release
The Military Veterans Coalition of Indiana
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Indiana has recently joined a growing number of states offering many first offender military service veterans a second chance. This past legislative session Indiana lawmakers included enabling legislation and funding in the budget bill to help formally expand veteran's treatment courts.

"The Military Veterans Coalition of Indiana and our partners thank Senators Zakas and Kenley and others by including enabling language and some funding in this past session's budget bill," states Lisa Wilken, Women's Liaison, AMVETS Indiana and Assistant Legislative Director, AMVETS Indiana. "This is a good start and we look forward to working on expansion around the state."

Why Veteran's Treatment Courts

"These young veterans are returning home and most need help finding decent paying jobs with benefits," said Zach McIlwain, with Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA).

"Unfortunately for a few their transition from the military back to civilian life has its challenges, and the Veteran's Treatment Court offers that needed second chance to these deserving Hoosier Heroes"

A Better Understanding

The first Veterans Treatment Court was launched in 2008 as a response to increasing numbers of veterans appearing before the courts to face charges stemming from substance abuse, mental health disorders, and/or trauma. Rather than face traditional sentencing, Veterans Treatment Courts hold veterans strictly accountable, while connecting them to veteran-specific resources, treatment and benefits.

Veterans Treatment Courts involve cooperation and collaboration with traditional partners found in Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts, such as the prosecutor, defense counsel, treatment

provider, probation, and law enforcement. Added to this interdisciplinary team are representatives of the VA – Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) – as well as State Department/Commission of Veterans Affairs, Vet Centers, Veterans Service Organizations such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans, Department of Labor, volunteer Veteran Mentors, and other veteran support organizations.

According to Justice For Vets, Veterans Treatment Courts allow jurisdictions to serve justice-involved veteran population as opposed to business as usual – having veterans appear before judges who may or may not have an understanding of their unique experiences. There are now 220 Veterans Treatment Courts nationwide with hundreds more being planned. This year, Veterans Treatment Courts will serve 11,000 veterans who would otherwise be incarcerated.

“Veterans Treatment Courts provide justice-involved veterans with the structure, accountability, treatment, and mentoring needed to repair their lives,” said Justice For Vets Director of Communications Chris Deutsch. “By keeping veterans out of jail and prison, Veterans Treatment Courts save their lives, families, and futures, while saving tax-payers a fortune.”

Indiana Moving Forward

In an effort to support existing veterans courts and the development of new veterans courts, the Indiana Supreme Court recently held a Veterans Court and Veterans Summit on October 19, 2015, at the Indiana War Memorial. The Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs and the Indiana State Bar Association Military and Veterans Affairs Committee were the Supreme Court’s partners on this event. Over 300 attendees included judges, military personnel, legislators, state and U.S. department of veterans affairs officials, veteran services organizations, prosecutors, probation officers, community corrections officers, defense counsel, mental health services providers, and others with an interest in serving or supporting criminal justice involved veterans. At the summit attendees received information on training and funding opportunities available for veterans courts.

“With the support of our Indiana Legislature, the Indiana State Bar Association and many Judges and Prosecutors around the state, we intend to ensure every veteran eligible for treatment court services is given the opportunity to participate.” said Indiana Supreme Court Justice Steven

David. “I applaud the work of Indiana veteran advocacy groups, we need and appreciate their support.”

“I want to thank Justice David and his staff for taking the lead on summit. This is an important step forward for Indiana. In addition my personal thanks to Senator Zakas and Senator Kenley for recognizing the value expansion of veterans treatment courts will have for Indiana. All counties were authorized these courts and only a few have been established leaving many veterans excluded and disadvantaged,” stated Jim Bauerle, Legislative Director, The Military Veterans Coalition of Indiana (MVCI).

The Military Veterans Coalition of Indiana and other partnering veterans groups are proposing legislation to help Veterans Courts and special medical needs of some veterans. First is a Veteran’s Scratch Card similar to Illinois. Such an initiative will raise money to support Veterans Treatment Courts with funding for Veterans Legal Clinics that provide free legal advice, and funding for county Veterans Service Officers to provide veterans counseling at the local level. Second is to create an Indiana veteran recovery program and fund. Proposed legislation establishes, for five years, the Indiana veteran recovery program and fund to provide treatment and funding for veterans with traumatic brain injury or posttraumatic stress disorder and to obtain reimbursement from third parties.

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