

**NINETY-SIXTH NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
Charlotte, North Carolina
August 26, 27, 28, 2014**

Resolution No. 159: Veteran Treatment Courts

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, When veterans return from combat, some turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with mental health issues as a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI); and

WHEREAS, An unfortunate number of veterans are entering the criminal justice system to face charges stemming from these issues; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, a judge in Buffalo, NY, created the first Veterans Treatment Court after seeing an increase in veterans' hearings on his dockets; and

WHEREAS, Veteran Treatment Courts are hybrid Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts and have evolved out of the growing need for a treatment court model designed specifically for justice-involved veterans to maximize efficiency and economize resources while making use of the distinct military culture consistent among veterans; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans that enter the veteran treatment courts are not aware of their federal, state, county and a variety of additional benefit programs, in particular, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits for compensation, pension and health care; and

WHEREAS, Grouping justice-involved veterans into a specific court docket significantly expedites access to veteran-specific resources, including benefits and treatment earned through military service; and

WHEREAS, In 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs sent a memorandum to the 152 VA Medical Centers recommending that a Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Coordinator be established at each of the VA Medical Centers nationwide to provide veterans with assistance in Veteran Treatment Courts and connect these veterans with VA benefits and assistance; and

WHEREAS, Currently, VA has not established a national Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive on the VJO program and a single staff person manages this program under the auspices of the VHA Homeless Office; and

WHEREAS, Only 120 of the 153 VA Medical Centers nationwide currently have VJO coordinators and their schedules are inconsistent in coverage of veteran treatment courts necessitating the need for national oversight, funding and clearly established policies and responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, Veteran service organizations, such as The American Legion, can assist these veterans in the Veteran Treatment Courts in pursuit of their VA claims and benefits or volunteering to help connect them with resources and assistance; and

WHEREAS, Veterans deeply value their military experience and share an inimitable bond among their peers and Veteran Treatment Courts build upon this camaraderie by allowing

participants to go through the treatment court process with people who are similarly situated and have common past experiences, and pairing veterans with volunteer veteran mentors; and

WHEREAS, Veteran Treatment Courts are able to better serve veterans and are greatly enhanced when American Legion department service officers are involved with the court process; and

WHEREAS, Justice For Vets, in coordination with the National Drug Court Institute, both professional service organizations of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, a 501(c) 3, non-for-profit organization, serves as the national clearinghouse for Veteran Treatment Courts and ensures Veteran Treatment Courts receive the proper training and technical assistance to be successful; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 26, 27, 28, 2014, That The American Legion urge Congress to continue to fund the establishment and expansion of Veterans Treatment Courts; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a separate program office within VA Central Office with an increased program budget and hiring of staff to expand the Veterans Justice Outreach program and policies; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion work with Justice for Veterans, at no cost to The American Legion, to provide training to The American Legion department service officers and American Legion volunteer veteran members interested in creating and/or supporting a Veterans Treatment Court in each appropriate community; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion recommends the various departments and posts provide non-monetary assistance and support to veteran treatment courts by having department service officers serve on the Veteran Treatment Court or having volunteers provide information on VA benefits and services.