



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge**

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Veterans Treatment Court Opens in Dutchess County

POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK—Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina Mendelson and Ninth Judicial District Administrative Judge Anne E. Minihan announce the opening of the Dutchess 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 Dutchess County Supreme and County Courthouse, is a partnership of the Court System's Ninth Judicial District, the Dutchess County District Attorney's Office, the local defense bar, the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (VA), the Dutchess County Mental Health Association and local veterans services providers, among others. The Court System's Office for Justice Initiatives' Division of Policy and Planning, led by Judge 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 VA, the VA's Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, peer veteran 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 Dutchess County VTC. Veterans will be assessed to determine eligibility for substance abuse, healthcare, employment, housing and other services and benefits. Participants may have their charges reduced or dismissed upon successful completion of treatment and other court requirements.

Hon. Jessica Segal will preside over the new Dutchess County Veterans Treatment Court. Judge Segal also presides over the County's drug treatment court.

"The new Dutchess 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 reintegrate as civilians and lead law-abiding lives. I am thankful to the Ninth Judicial District, the Court System's Division of Policy and Planning, the Dutchess County District Attorney's Office and our other justice system partners for their efforts in expanding the successful VTC model in New York State," said Judge Marks.

“The Dutchess County VTC has been tailored to the unique needs of service members who have sacrificed so much for our country and now find themselves on the wrong side of the law, offering alternatives to conventional prosecution to facilitate their successful transition back into the community. I look forward to the continued success and expansion throughout New York of this vital problem-solving court model,” said Judge St. George.

“New York continues to be a national leader in promoting judicial diversion for our veterans. I am grateful to Chief Administrative Judge Marks for his vision and support for our work in this area and congratulate Administrative Judge Minihan for launching the first of what will be several new Veterans Treatment Courts in the Ninth Judicial District,” said Judge Mendelson.

“We owe so much to our veterans for their service to our country and communities but as many of us know, it is not easy for many veterans to return to civilian life. VTC judges, staff and stakeholders are uniquely positioned to work with this distinctive population,” said Hon. Toko Serita, the Court System’s Statewide Coordinating Judge for Problem-Solving Courts.

“The veterans court model is a team effort, comprising local stakeholders interested in making a real impact in our veterans’ lives,” said Judge Segal. “More than a guilty verdict, we are focused on rehabilitating these men and women who have defended our nation, giving them a chance to turn their lives around and constructively contribute to their community.”

“The District Attorney’s Office fully supports the creation of a Veterans Treatment Court for the Dutchess County residents 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, making the appropriate services available within a supervised setting of the court,” said Dutchess County Chief Assistant District Attorney Matthew Weishaupt. “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.”

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 Dutchess County VTC, there are now 32 Veterans Treatment Courts operating in 24 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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