



## Veteran Treatment Courts

AMVETS advocates for increased acceptance and expansion of veteran treatment courts across the country. These courts aim to prevent needless incarceration of justice-involved war veterans, and instead treat post-deployment mental health issues, as well as behavioral issues stemming from mild TBIs. On this issue, AMVETS supports the *Veterans Court Improvement Act of 2017* which aims to hire at least 50 Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists (VJOS) within a year of enactment, each VJOS hired would serve, either exclusively or in addition to other duties, in a veteran treatment court. The Secretary would ensure that the newly hired VJOS supplement the number of existing Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists, not replace current staff.

We also support the *Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2017* which expresses the sense of Congress that veteran treatment courts are a successful program aimed at helping veterans charged with non-violent crimes receive the help and the benefits they are entitled to and have earned.

VA's Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) program aims to prevent homelessness, and avoid the unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among veterans. VA aims to ensure that eligible justice-involved veterans end up in a situation with the police, or who are in jails or the court system, have timely access to VA mental health, substance abuse, and homeless services if needed, and other VA services and benefits as appropriate.

In 2016 the VJO program provided services to over 50,800 justice-involved veterans; VA provided support to 463 Veteran Treatment Courts and other veteran-focused court programs; and VA partnered with legal providers to offer 125 pro-bono legal clinics to veterans on site at VA Medical Centers.

This issue goes straight to the heart of our organization. In 2008, our then National Commander J.P. Brown worked with Judge Russell in Buffalo New York on the establishment of our country's first veteran treatment court. These courts reach out and hold the proverbial hand of justice involved veterans and guide them down a better path. The results and percentages of veterans that complete the program is quite incredible, and we will advocate and assist wherever possible for veteran treatment courts and their unique hybrid of Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts to not only continue, but to expand.