



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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Hon. Kevin M. Carter
Administrative Judge
Eighth Judicial District

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Cattaraugus County Opens Veterans Treatment Court

Olean, New York—Eighth Judicial District Administrative Judge Kevin M. Carter announced the opening of the Cattaraugus County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC), a problem-solving court targeting justice-involved veterans charged with misdemeanors and felonies and who may be suffering from addiction, mental health issues, and other combat-related disorders. The new VTC, located in the Olean City Courthouse, 101 East State St., Olean, NY, is a partnership of the Court System’s Eighth Judicial District, the Cattaraugus County District Attorney’s Office, the local defense bar, the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Cattaraugus County Department of Probation, and local service providers, among others. The Court System’s Office for Justice Initiatives, Division of Policy and Planning, led by Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina G. Richardson, 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. The VA’s Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, veteran peer mentors, veteran services

providers, probation, and other organizations work collaboratively to effectively address both the unique needs of justice-involved veterans, which include a review of VA benefits and coordinated clinical services. Key features of the VTC model include rigorous treatment services, intensive judicial monitoring, collaboration, 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 justice-involved veterans.

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 Cattaraugus County VTC. All military discharges will be considered, including prior or current service from the US Armed Forces, Reserves and National Guard. Referrals for the VTC can be made by defense counsel, prosecutors, clinicians, probation, veteran service agencies and other sources. All referrals will be vetted by the Cattaraugus District Attorney's Office and the respective defense attorney. The point of contact for VTC referrals is Stacie Holcomb, Acting VTC Coordinator. The court will hear felony and misdemeanor level cases. Veterans will be assessed to determine eligibility for substance abuse, healthcare, housing, clinical services, and benefits. Participants may have their charges reduced or dismissed upon successful completion of treatment and other court requirements.

The Honorable Nicholas A. DiCerbo will preside over the Cattaraugus County Veterans Treatment Court. "I am excited that we have been given the opportunity to establish a Veterans Treatment Court to serve the Veterans of Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties," Judge DiCerbo said "As an increasing number of these brave men and women carry the invisible scars of PTSD, often resulting in substance abuse and mental health disorders, they will no longer face these struggles alone. This court is a commitment to provide the support, understanding, and tailored justice they deserve, by helping our veterans heal, rebuild, and reintegrate into our communities with dignity and hope."

The Honorable Edwina G. Richardson said, “With an emphasis on rehabilitation, our Veterans Treatment Courts play an important role in our justice system. Many of our veterans suffer from a substance abuse and/or mental health disorder. VTCs are all about forming local, sustainable community collaboratives to help our veterans, and the Eighth Judicial District has gone above and beyond in this regard by building the infrastructure needed to serve New York’s justice-involved veteran population. I congratulate the Cattaraugus County community for coming together to build this court and I applaud Administrative Judge Carter and Judge DiCerbo for their leadership. I also extend my gratitude to the incredible peer mentors whose military experience and dedication will be instrumental to the court’s success.”

Daryl Bloom, the Cattaraugus County Public Defender, stated, “I represent disadvantaged people in the justice system and therefore I recognize that veterans often have unique needs in that system and deserve to have those needs fulfilled because of their noble service to the nation; the Veterans Treatment Court Program serves this important function”.

Lori Reiman, the Cattaraugus County District Attorney, stated, “It is great to have this program available to assist veterans who struggle with addiction and mental health issues-many of which were sustained during their service. While there are veteran treatment courts in some other Western New York counties, transportation often renders them unavailable for our Cattaraugus County veterans. I am very excited that we can better assist this very underserved yet deserving group.”

Michael Sharbaugh, the Director of Cattaraugus County Probation, said, “Those who serve our country most bravely, often return home to find their lives made more difficult due to mental health and substance abuse issues directly related to their service. Further, these issues frequently lead veterans to become involved in the criminal justice system. The Cattaraugus County Probation Department very much looks forward to working with the Veterans Treatment Court, in order address some of the issues unique to military life, to help create and maintain safe and peaceful communities, and give back to our veterans at least some of what they have given to all of us.”

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 Cattaraugus VTC, there are now 37 VTCs operating in 26 New York counties encompassing urban, suburban, and rural communities.

For more information about New York's VTCs and other problem-solving courts, visit:

https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/problem_solving/

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