

# *News Advisory*

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



## **District Court veterans program gets \$754,000 grant**

**October 27, 2014:** The Rhode Island District Court is the recipient of a \$754,000 federal grant for its Veterans Treatment Calendar. The grant was awarded by the federal Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), and will be paid over three years. The funds will support and augment operations of the Veterans Calendar as it expands to serve an estimated additional 250 veterans statewide. The specialized calendar is a jail diversion program aimed at addressing veterans charged primarily with misdemeanor offenses.

“We have a moral obligation to ensure that veterans who suffer from drug and alcohol addiction get the resources they need,” said U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, who joined District Court Chief Judge Jeanne E. LaFazia in announcing the grant.

Senator Whitehouse has been a strong advocate for the program since its inception in early 2011. Chief Judge LaFazia said it was the first such calendar in New England. Last April, it celebrated a milestone with the graduation of its 100<sup>th</sup> participant. It is a highly structured program that incorporates substantial treatment with frequent court reviews. It has received positive national attention as well as support from state leaders and the Rhode Island congressional delegation. The court’s success is a reflection of the dedication and experience of the entire Veterans Treatment Calendar team as well as the motivation of the veterans who have participated in the program.

Enhanced services will include random toxicology screenings, 24/7 transdermal alcohol testing, remote alcohol breath testing, increased case management capacity, as well as individualized treatment interventions. With the addition of two evidence-based cognitive behavioral treatment components, clinical programming is expected to be comprehensive and effective in addressing the clinical symptomology associated with trauma and substance use disorders as well as causes of criminal behavior. The grant also will provide the court with the evaluation component needed to determine best practices, cost efficiency, and sustainability of all aspects of the Veterans Treatment Calendar; it will also provide the computer database needed for reporting data both internally and to local and governmental agencies.

“The Rhode Island District Court is thrilled with this award,” said Chief Judge LaFazia. “It will provide the Veterans Treatment Court with tremendous opportunities to better address the challenges faced by these veterans.”

Close to 9 million service members were on active duty during the Vietnam era. Recent statistics indicate that close to 2.4 million Americans have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. As of the 2010 census, the rate of Rhode Islanders who served in the Gulf Wars is three times the national average. The callback of Rhode Island’s National Guard is the second highest in the nation. The effect on our soldiers from these multiple deployments can be significant, Chief Judge LaFazia said. Some return and face problems reintegrating into society; some find themselves

unexpectedly in the criminal justice system.

Chief Judge LaFazia said that the courts have a responsibility to recognize and assist these men and women. She has repeatedly emphasized that “we do not desert our soldiers on the battlefield and we should not desert them when they return home with injuries, which although invisible, have altered who they are or what they do. These Veterans Treatment Calendars are proving themselves nationwide to be an effective means of dealing with the special problems faced by this population.”

Senator Whitehouse chaired a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism hearing in 2011 on veterans’ treatment courts, which included testimony from Chief Judge LaFazia.

“Today, the Veterans Administration reports a direct relationship between post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse, and connecting veterans to resources, including veterans courts, can help veterans get their lives back on track,” Senator Whitehouse said. “I congratulate Chief Judge LaFazia and everyone involved with the Rhode Island Veterans Treatment Calendar, and thank them for their commitment to our veterans.”

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