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Bexar County launches newest restorative justice court for veterans

Bexar County is growing its restorative justice program with the addition of a Veterans Treatment Court to serve former military service members who are struggling with addiction, serious mental illness or dual diagnoses as a result of their service. The foundation of the court is the same philosophy that governs the County's successful Drug Court Programs.

"Jail is not a place for nonviolent offenders who are committing crimes as a result of mental illness or substance abuse, which are treatable illnesses and not crimes," County Judge Nelson W. Wolff said. "We've found through our Drug Courts that if we treat the root cause of a person's criminal behavior – their drug addiction or mental illness – that person is less likely to return to jail or prison."

The 81st Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 1940, authored by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, to allow county commissioners courts throughout the state the authority to establish such courts for misdemeanor and felony offenses when the defendant is a veteran with brain injury, mental illness or mental disorder, including post-traumatic stress disorder. This treatment court will be the first in Bexar County to include a pre-trial diversion component, which would keep veterans who qualify from entering the jail. If a person successfully completes the pre-trial component, the case will be dismissed without a record a criminal conviction.

“Bexar County’s very own Veterans Treatment Court represents this community’s dedication to the men and women who wear our nation’s uniform,” Sen. Van de Putte said. “In acknowledging the unique needs of our combat veterans, Bexar County has come together and proven yet again why San Antonio can proudly and rightly call itself ‘Military City USA’.”

The Court will promote sobriety, recovery and stability through a coordinated response that involves cooperation and collaboration with numerous partners and stakeholders, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care networks, the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Bexar County Veterans Services Office. Case management in the Court will promote service coordination and easier access to services such as employment, education, housing and benefits counseling.

The military has a strong presence in Bexar County and has much to do with the historical development of this area. With the second largest population of veterans in the state and one of the premier treatment centers for the military, Bexar County leaders recognize that treatment and accountability are rehabilitative concepts that will allow our veterans to regain purposeful and productive lives.

The Veterans Treatment Court docket will be called in County Court-at-Law No. 6, presided over by Judge Ray Olivarri.