

Veterans Court Program

Veterans Court Program

Men and women in our military pay a cost for our freedom that continues long after their service ends. The Fort Bend County Veterans Court Program gives our military men and women the opportunity to get their lives back on track after facing criminal charges.

Overview

The Fort Bend County Veterans Court Program provides judicially supervised treatment options for veterans currently facing prosecution for one or more criminal offenses. The program focuses on removing veterans from the traditional criminal justice process and placing them in more rehabilitative options. To enter the program, the veteran must be screened, assessed, and approved. Once that process is complete, the veteran will begin the treatment program tailored to his/her needs.

Mission

The mission is to successfully rehabilitate veterans by diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system and providing them with the tools they need to lead a productive and law-abiding lifestyle while improving mental health recovery and successful re-entry into the community.

Goals

The program's goals are to identify eligible veterans, assess their needs, offer assistance, manage their care, and provide them with successful treatment options ultimately leading to community reintegration, and resolution of their criminal case(s).

Eligibility Criteria

- Veteran or current member of the United States Armed Forces, including a member of the Reserves, National Guard, or State Guard
- Served in combat or hazardous duty
- Honorable or General Discharge, active duty or reserves
- Have pending eligible offense
- Be a legal resident of/or citizen of the United States
- Be a resident of Fort Bend County or surrounding counties
- Have mental health, TBI, and/or substance abuse that is related to the criminal offense
- Be eligible for VA services
- District Attorney (DA) Approval: All cases are reviewed by the Fort Bend County District Attorney's Office for final approval

Exclusions

- Pending case for Sexual offense, drug delivery or all 3G offenses with the exception of aggravated assault
- Prior conviction or deferred adjudication for sexual assault or 3G offenses with the exception of aggravated assault
- Person is seriously and persistently mentally ill and cannot participate
- Has been previously terminated or graduated from Veterans Court
- Dishonorable Discharge from the United States Armed Forces

Referrals

Accepted from a variety of sources, including law enforcement, jail staff, judges, defense attorneys, prosecutors, mental health professionals, and family or friends.

Those admitted to the court will receive pre-trial intervention, deferred adjudication or community supervision. Veterans Court is a three-phase program. Each phase requires the successful completion of a variety of activities. The length of the program is up to 24 months. The Fort Bend County Veterans Court Program will consist of one court docket that will meet once per month. The Honorable Judge McMeans presides over the Veterans Court.

The Veterans Court team is comprised of a judge, prosecutor, defense attorneys, a community supervision officer, case managers, and representatives from the Veterans Administration Medical Center. A unique feature of the Veterans Court team is the MEDVAMC Jail Diversion Team that includes a Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Coordinator/Court Liaison and a Forensic Psychiatrist.

The Jail Diversion Team will provide thorough evaluations, assessing psychiatric, psychosocial, and substance abuse service needs, and link veterans to appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services. The VJO coordinator will coordinate and monitor treatment adherence, the psychiatrist will address psychiatric treatment needs and together this treatment team will provide progress reports for the Veterans Court Team.

Program Cost

Subject to a program fee up to \$1000. The veteran may be responsible for costs of treatment services including, but not limited to drug urinalysis, evaluations, inpatient/outpatient treatment, counseling, etc.

Protocol

The Fort Bend County Veterans Court consists of three (3) phases totaling up to twenty-four (24) months. In addition to the phase requirements, the Presiding Judge reserves the right to set specific individual goals that must be accomplished before the next court appearance. The Veterans Court

Community Supervision Officer will review all goals prior to all court appearances and make recommendations based on completion and success. The veteran's movement from phase to phase depends on time, successful completion of each phase's requirements, and team recommendations.

Phases

Phase One - up to 6 months

- Meet with the community supervision officer for 3 face-to-face contacts per month, with 1 of the 3 contacts being in the field at the veteran's home or other location
- Review before the judge once per month
- Report to counselor per treatment plan

Phase Two - up to 6 months

- Meet with the community supervision officer for 2 face-to-face contacts per month, with 1 of the 2 contacts being in the field at the veteran's home or other location
- Review before the judge once per month
- Report to counselor per treatment plan

Phase Three - up to 12 months

- Meet with the community supervision officer once per month
- Review before the judge once per month
- Report to counselor per treatment plan

Sanctions and Incentives

Failure to comply with treatment recommendations, Veterans Court program regulations or commission of new offense may result in sanctions. Program infractions and sanctions include, but are not limited to:

Infractions

- Missed treatment appointments
- Missed probation appointments
- Missed court appearances
- Abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Refusal to provide urine screens
- Positive urine screens
- Failure or refusal to take prescribed medications
- Violation of rules of the treatment program
- Violation of rules of housing provider, including curfew
- Threatening behavior, including verbal threat of violence
- Other non-compliance with treatment recommendations
- Violation of probation terms and conditions

Sanctions

- Assign to write an essay
- Verbal warning
- Increase frequency of urine screens
- Increased frequency of court appearances
- Increase frequency of probation and/or Pre-trial reporting
- Increase 12 step or support groups meetings
- Loss of privileges at treatment
- Loss of privileges at housing
- Serving time in jail
- Impose a curfew
- Community service
- More restrictive Pre-Trial services program
- Restarting current phase

Incentives

Incentives may be awarded by the Presiding Judge for complying with the established treatment plan, the rules of the Veterans Court Program, the rules of the Fort Bend CSCD, if imposed, Judge orders, and all other conditions or requirements associated with participation in the Program. Incentives include, but are not limited to:

- Praise, acclaim or recognition from the Judge
- Gift cards or gift certificates
- Decreased visits with Community Supervision Officer
- Decreased appearances at Veterans Court sessions
- Decreased participation in self-help meetings, such as AA or NA
- Decreased treatment requirements
- Forgiveness of additional community service hours
- Reduction or suspension of unpaid fines
- Phase advancement
- Furloughs from testing and/or treatment
- Recognition certificate at graduation
- Graduation from the Veterans Court Program

Veterans Court will require following a treatment plan, which will include some or all of the following components (treatment recommendations may change as individual treatment needs change).

- Abstinence from illegal drugs and alcohol
- Medication compliance
- Participation in a substance abuse treatment program
- Participation in a behavioral health treatment program
- Participation in a self-help group or program
- Intensive or Supportive case management services
- Supported or Structured housing
- Education services
- Employment or Vocational Rehabilitation
- Regular appointments with a VA case manager
- Regular appointments with a psychiatrist
- Psycho-social or Recreational program

Handbook

Download / Print

- [Veterans Court Handbook II \[PDF\]](#)