

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Delaware Veterans Treatment Court Holds Statewide Retreat

*More than 100 attended the informational and training event
marking the 15th year of the specialty court*

The Delaware Judiciary, in conjunction with the Delaware Department of Correction and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, held a day-long day long retreat at the Kent County Courthouse in Dover on Wednesday to raise awareness about the Delaware Veterans Treatment Court and to share best practices.

The retreat drew more than 100 attendees including judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, veterans' officials, peer mentors, social workers and advocates among others.

"I tell veterans when they come to Veterans Court that it is going to be harder than regular probation because there are so many more eyes on you," said Sussex County Superior Court Resident Judge Craig Karsnitz, who oversees the program in Sussex County. The oversight and support that veterans who participate in the program get "is as helpful as anything I've ever seen since I've been on the bench," he said.

Delaware Veterans Treatment Court was founded in 2011 by retired Superior Court Judge William Witham, a retired veteran himself, who provided remarks at the retreat on the history of the program. The program, which is designed to address the unique needs and challenges faced by veterans, was modeled on similar treatment courts in other states. Participants in the program must attend regular court status conferences, participate in the development of their treatment plans, engage with community groups and cooperate with veteran mentors. Those who successfully complete the program are eligible for early discharge and if appropriate may see their charges dropped, similar to other diversion programs.

In addition to simply raising awareness about the program, organizers also hoped the retreat helped those in the justice system and elsewhere recognize – early on – who could qualify for and benefit from the program. "I hope everyone in the room left having a clear picture of how someone actually gets identified, connected and into Veterans Treatment Court if they qualify," said Senior Probation Officer Christopher Nichols, an Army veteran with service in a foreign theater of operations. Identifying someone who could benefit does little good if nobody knows what to do next, he said.

Kent County Superior Court Resident Judge Jeff J Clark, who oversees the program in Kent County, said the statewide retreat was “overdue as evidenced by today’s incredible turnout. It shows what a pent-up demand we have in this state to support veterans and to come together to see what others do well and then incorporate those practices into our own.”

Getting together as a group – across different organizations – to review standards and best practices keeps everyone “on the same page and is always beneficial,” said Delaware Statewide Problem-Solving Courts Coordinator Minda V. Thompson.

“The court is grateful to all of those who prepared today’s program and who attended and contributed to this wonderful event,” said Judge Clark. The program works “to serve and help those who have dedicated a significant part of their lives to serving us all,” he said.

Others who attended the Aug. 26 retreat included: Superior Court President Judge Eric M. Davis; Superior Court Judge Paul R. Wallace (who oversees the program in New Castle County); Delaware Secretary of Veterans Affairs Karen Berry along with a number of officials from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs including National Training Director, Veterans Justice Programs, Dr. Matthew Stimmel. Scott Tirocchi, Division Director, Justice for Vets of the national advocacy organization All Rise, appeared via video.

Additional information about Delaware Veterans Treatment Court is available on the [court website](#).