



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

August 29, 2011

Contact: Patti McBride
(206) 684-8710
Patti.mcbride@seattle.gov

Seattle Municipal Court Launches Veterans Court

(Seattle) The intent of a Veterans Court is to balance the needs of veterans for treatment as a result of substance abuse and/or mental health disorders with the need to safely protect the surrounding community. The goal is to provide non-violent offenders with effective treatment and, at the same time, hold people accountable for their actions. Post-traumatic stress disorder can be an underlying factor in crimes allegedly committed and subsequent involvement with the court.

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals reports that one in six veterans returning from the Afghanistan and Iraqi wars suffer from a substance abuse challenge. One in five has symptoms of a mental disorder or cognitive impairment.

On September 20, Seattle Municipal Court will launch the State's fifth veteran's court program. "I am elated and proud to be a part of this effort to address the needs of those who have given so much and who have suffered so much," said Presiding Judge Fred Bonner. "I appreciate the efforts of City Attorney Peter Holmes and his staff, The Associated Counsel for the Accused, as well as Don Madsen and his staff for making the implementation of this veterans treatment program a reality."

"The City of Seattle Municipal Court once again is in the forefront in addressing the critical needs of vulnerable segments of our society," said Donald Madsen, Managing Director of Associated Counsel for the Accused. "This innovative Court will help in providing services to veterans with psychological or substance abuse issues as a result of their service to their country." "It is most appropriate and responsible to give attention and care to our veterans who need our help. "Thank you to Burns Petersen from ACA, who played a significant role in the planning and development of this Court."

Kevin Devine, Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator for the Seattle Division of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System stated, “We know that war-zone military service profoundly affects people. For some, successful reintegration back into civilian life can be especially problematic and can lead to contact with the criminal justice system. VA Puget Sound welcomes this opportunity to partner with the Seattle Municipal Court to link Veterans struggling with war-related mental health problems to the treatment they need.”

“Providing a specialized court experience for veterans is a logical extension of the services already available in Mental Health Court and Community Court,” said City Attorney Peter Holmes.” “My office is dedicated to ensuring that veterans will be held accountable for misdemeanor crimes but in the supportive environment they deserve. I particularly applaud Assistant City Attorney Supervisor Jennifer Grant for her tenacity in involving our Criminal Division in this effort and Presiding Judge Fred Bonner for shepherding this innovative court to creation.”

###