



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Veterans Court officially begins in Jackson County**

A court that handles lesser offenses committed by military veterans was officially started today, July 2, in Jackson County.

Officials from the Circuit Court of Jackson County, the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Kansas City all recognize that veterans sometimes have a difficult time with the transition from combat situations to civilian life. Some veterans make mistakes that can land them in the criminal justice system. Nationally, the most common types of criminal charges against veterans include drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and weapons charges.

"The Veterans Court is designed to get veterans the treatment they need without the harsh edges of the criminal justice system," said Commissioner David J. Fry.

The Veterans Court is similar to the Drug Court in that defendants who are charged with a crime can get their case dismissed and will not have a criminal record, if they succeed at an extensive court ordered treatment program. Unlike the Drug Court, Veterans Court will not only work with defendants who are on diversion, but will also work with defendants who are on probation and have already pled guilty.

The Prosecutor's Office will review their cases, look at their profile and make decisions about whether a defendant is eligible for their case to be heard in Veterans Court. People charged with Class A offenses or sex offenses will not be eligible, and their cases will proceed as usual in the criminal justice system.

In order to qualify for Veterans Court, the defendant must be a veteran and must be eligible for services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VA has a multitude of services and treatment to provide to veterans. The services will be provided without cost to Jackson County.

For those veterans who are not eligible for VA services because of a dishonorable discharge, treatment assistance may be provided through a \$20,000 grant from the Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA), while the veteran appeals their designation through the Department of Defense.

Today's ceremony to kick off the Veterans Court featured speeches by Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker, Veterans Court Commissioner David Fry, Senior Circuit Judge William F Mauer, U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill, Missouri Supreme Court Judge William Ray Price, and Dr. James Sanders – Chief of Staff of the Kansas City VA Medical Center.

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