



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge**

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Veterans Court Opens in Staten Island

New York – Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today joined Richmond County Administrative Judge for Criminal Matters Stephen J. Rooney, Staten Island District Attorney Michael E. McMahon and other officials to inaugurate the borough’s first court tailored to veterans involved in the justice system who may be suffering from addiction, mental illness or co-occurring disorders. The Richmond County Veterans Court (RCVC) will link eligible veteran-offenders to treatment and services in an effort to divert them from incarceration.

The new court is a collaborative effort of New York’s state court system, the Richmond County District Attorney’s office, the local defense bar, the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, local veterans service organizations, local treatment providers, Workforce1 and the College of Staten Island, among others.

In addition to providing veteran-offenders access to treatment for substance abuse, PTSD and other combat-related disorders, the RCVC will also offer a range of support services to address associated problems, such as unemployment and homelessness. To promote participants’ success, the court will incorporate the use of peer mentors – military veterans who volunteer their time to offer justice-involved veterans support and motivation as they navigate the legal process and the challenges of re-integration to civilian life.

“As Veterans Day nears, we are especially pleased to announce a new problem-solving court in Staten Island whose customized approach recognizes the unique challenges faced by our returning servicemen and women, who have risked so much for our safety and freedom,” said

Chief Administrative Judge Marks. “The Richmond County Veterans Court will address the root causes of criminal behavior, ensuring that eligible veterans who have addiction problems, PTSD or other disorders related to their military service receive the treatment, services and support they need to turn their lives around. I commend District Attorney McMahon, the defense bar, the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs and our other partners for their outstanding efforts in bringing this court to fruition.”

“There is no greater sacrifice than serving one’s country and my office is committed to honoring and respecting our nation’s veterans by ensuring that their needs are met within the criminal justice system. The new Richmond County Veteran’s Court will offer an alternative to incarceration to veterans accused of committing non-violent crimes, and provide customized tools, treatment and peer mentorship in order to help move them into a better life. I am proud to partner with the Office of Court Administration to open this treatment court, which will be a lifeline – and a lifesaver – for veterans who need it the most,” said Richmond County District Attorney McMahon.

“Richmond County joins the growing movement to use our justice system to help our veterans. Our men and women stepped forward to protect our country, but military experience can have a lasting impact long after the service is done. Veterans Court provides treatment and mentoring, with accountability to veterans who are struggling that will benefit veterans and our community,” said Christopher Pisciotta, attorney in charge, Richmond County Office, Legal Aid Society Criminal Defense Practice.

“I am very pleased about the opening of the Veterans Court in Staten Island. As with the Veterans Courts that have already opened in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan, VA and its partners in this initiative are proud to support veterans who have become entangled with the criminal justice system. These courts help veterans gain the treatment they need and benefit from a second chance at a productive life,” said Martina Parauda, director, VA NY Harbor Healthcare System.

All service veterans, regardless of combat history or discharge status, will be considered for acceptance into the RCVC. Both misdemeanor and felony cases will be considered. Veterans will be identified through evidence-based screening and assessments made by clinical and legal staff.

The presiding judge, the prosecutor’s office, the veteran and his or her attorney, as well as any appropriate clinical staff, must be unanimous in the decision to formally accept a justice-involved veteran into the RCVC. Every RCVC participant will be evaluated to determine their eligibility for any additional veterans’ benefits, including health care, housing benefits and

educational aid. Clinical input from treatment providers and the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs will inform the duration of services. Upon successful completion of the program, participants may have their charges reduced or dismissed.

Judge Rooney, a veteran himself, will preside over the RCVC.

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