

TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

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INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION MEETS, PUBLISHES VETERANS DEFENDER RESOURCE

AUSTIN –The Texas Indigent Defense Commission published the *Veterans Defender Resource* for county and court officials who are interested in the creation of a new Veterans Court or enhancing their existing problem solving courts with the addition of a defender component. A law recently passed by the Texas legislature authorized counties to establish a Veterans Courts. According to Senator Leticia Van de Putte, “Senator Rodney Ellis and I authored legislation to create Veterans Courts in Texas counties because we saw the need to recognize the unique challenges faced by service members who have endured the stresses of combat. Our war fighters have sacrificed so much for us; they deserve special consideration in helping deal with the complexities within the criminal justice and legal system.”

Defendants are eligible to participate in a veterans court program only if the attorney representing the state consents to the defendant's participation in the program and if the court in which the criminal case is pending finds that the defendant is a veteran or current member of the United States armed forces, including a member of the reserves, national guard, or state guard; and suffers from a brain injury, mental illness, or mental disorder, including post-traumatic stress disorder, that resulted from the defendant's military service in a combat zone or other similar hazardous duty area and materially affected the defendant's criminal conduct at issue in the case.

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission provides an array of support to counties that wish to implement initiatives that will improve access to the right to counsel. The *Veterans Defender Resource* provides information about how counties can access this support through the Commission's discretionary grant programs. Additionally, the *Resource* includes a directory of the currently operating Veterans Courts programs throughout the state. Many of the judges who have chosen to run Veterans Courts may be valuable sources of wisdom and advice as a new court is formed. According to Judge Brent Carr of Tarrant County, “The veteran's court has been an incredible experience. This program is not a gift to a veteran, it is an opportunity. By completing a professionally designed course of therapy and treatment, the veteran has the opportunity to correct destructive behavior and have his or her good name restored. This is good for the veteran, the veteran's family, and the community. It's the least we can do.”

The *Veterans Defender Resource* is available on the Commission's website:

[http://www.courts.state.tx.us/tidc/pdf/VetDefenderMarch28Publication\(Final\).pdf](http://www.courts.state.tx.us/tidc/pdf/VetDefenderMarch28Publication(Final).pdf)