



**King County
District Court
Office of the Presiding Judge**

W1034 King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104
Telephone: (206) 205-2820
Fax: (206) 296-0596

**The Honorable Barbara Linde
Chief Presiding Judge**

**Tricia Crozier
Chief Administrative Officer**

May 31, 2011

Re: Veteran's Court Proviso – District Court response

Dear Council Chair Gossett,

On behalf of the King County District Court, I am writing to express support for the concept of a Veteran's Court. Specifically, District Court supports moving forward with a pilot project Veteran's Track within the Regional Mental Health Court. As you know, King County District Court is committed to providing a focused, therapeutic response to issues involving criminal justice, public safety, and mental illness. A Veteran's Court would add to the District Court's current initiatives, while remaining wholly consistent with the Court's mission.

Working collaboratively with the Courts and its stakeholders, the Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget (PSB) has prepared a Veteran's Court proviso response. The proviso response describes five options, three of which involve the District Court. Option Two proposes a pilot Veteran's Track in the existing Regional Mental Health Court, and is the option within the proviso response that has been approved by the King County District Court Executive Committee.

District Court does not support options one and five. Option one, the consolidated court, would forgo many of the identified benefits of the Veteran's Court: a close connection between the court and the Veteran's treatment agencies, a community of interest among the participants, and certain specialized services, such as mentoring, which are not available in mental health courts.

Option five, the standalone court, would require duplication of administration and other resources, with no added value. The process for initiating the court would take longer than establishing a separate track within an existing court structure. A standalone court would also raise the potential for lack of coordinated knowledge and effort between the Veteran's Court and the Regional Mental Health Court.

There is additional work to be done prior to proceeding with a veteran's court track within the Regional Mental Health Court. District Court is currently engaging in preliminary planning to address two primary areas of concern. The first broad area of inquiry is the judicial policy concerns which exist with any justice based initiative: Equal Protection under the law, Due Process, public safety and the effectiveness of an intervention. The second area of inquiry is the operational aspect of the Veteran's Court. District Court is committed to leading this inquiry in a collaborative environment. After a period of planning, District Court is willing to lead a one year pilot project. At the close of the pilot project, an assessment would be performed.

It is anticipated that the Option Two pilot project can be completed without additional resources. Through a King County Council budget initiative, King County District Court began an expansion of its Mental Health Court to serve all suburban cities in King County last year. This is an incremental expansion, occurring over a period of two years. The expansion will be complete during 2012. The currently available capacity in Regional Mental Health Court allows King County District Court and its justice partners to expand services to include participants in a Veteran's Court pilot program, without added resources. Continuance of the Veteran's Court after the one year pilot project will be dependent upon the availability of resources.

King County District Court looks forward to working to expand the therapeutic justice model to include a Veteran's Court pilot project.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Barbara Linde
Chief Presiding Judge
King County District Court

cc: King County District Court Judges

Richard McDermott, Presiding Judge, King County Superior Court

Dow Constantine, King County Executive

Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget

Krista Camenzind, Budget Supervisor, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget