



## Legislation Text

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Clerk 08/18/2011

AN ORDINANCE relating to the establishment of a veterans treatment court.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

**SECTION 1. Findings:**

A. There are twenty-three million four hundred thousand veterans in the United States; one million seven hundred thousand of those are veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Washington state has six hundred twenty-three thousand veterans, and there are one hundred forty-three thousand veterans in King County.

B. Veterans are not more likely to be arrested than the general population. However, significant numbers of veterans become involved with the criminal justice system as they return to civilian life and struggle with mental health issues, substance abuse illnesses, or homelessness, or any combination thereof. The combination of mental health problems and substance abuse can trigger behaviors that result in criminal justice system involvement.

C. A 2000 Bureau of Justice Statistics report noted that eighty-one percent of all justice-involved veterans had a substance abuse problem prior to incarceration and thirty-five percent were identified as having alcohol dependency. Another study found that one in three homeless adults had served in the United States military.

D. Many veterans returning from recent conflicts abroad may also struggle with posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. Posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury can cause violent outbursts, and the conditions are often self-medicated with alcohol and drugs.

E. National statistics show that veterans are over-represented among those who commit suicide,

constituting about twenty percent of the thirty thousand to thirty-two thousand United States deaths each year from suicide. On average, eighteen veterans commit suicide each day.

F. Veterans treatment courts are specialty therapeutic courts designed to address the unique needs of individuals who have served in the United States military and help these veterans to overcome the challenges they face as they return from conflict. Veterans treatment courts are problem solving courts that integrate treatment with justice-system case management, in which participants are closely supervised and monitored.

G. Veterans treatment courts are distinct from other therapeutic drug and mental health courts in that they exclusively focus on veterans and the emphasize utilization of treatment and benefits provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

H. The first veterans treatment court was started in 2008 in Buffalo, New York. There are nearly eighty veterans treatment courts in, or beginning, operation across the country. Four counties in Washington state currently operate veterans treatment courts: Clark, Spokane, Pierce and Thurston.

I. Establishment of a veterans treatment court in King County would follow the county's innovative history of implementing specialty therapeutic courts; King County adult drug court began in 1994 and mental health court started in 1999.

J. The 2011 Budget Ordinance, Ordinance 16984, called for a report on the feasibility of, and plan for, the implementation of a pilot project for providing specialty court services for veterans.

SECTION 2. The recommendation to implement a veterans treatment court as part of the county's regional mental health court is hereby accepted, and the executive, in collaboration with the district court and the county's other criminal justice agencies, shall work to implement the recommendation by January 1, 2012.

SECTION 3. In collaboration with district court and the county's other criminal justice agencies, the executive shall work to establish a veterans treatment court in King County with the following policy goals:

1. A reduction of the number of veterans who are mentally ill, have posttraumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, or any combination thereof, or who use costly interventions such as jail, emergency

rooms and hospitals;

2. A reduction of the number of veterans who cycle through the jail, returning repeatedly as a result of their mental illness, posttraumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, or any combination thereof;

3. Diversion of veterans who are mentally ill, have posttraumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, or any combination thereof, from initial or further justice system involvement; and

4. Explicit linkage with United States Department of Veterans Affairs programs and services.

SECTION 4. In collaboration with district court, the office of the prosecuting attorney, the office of public defense and superior court, the executive shall review options for continuing veterans treatment court beyond the recommendation's initial pilot year and shall recommend a proposed strategy to provide veterans and human services levy funds for a veterans treatment court in King County. The recommendation shall be submitted to the council at the same time as the transmittal of the 2013 Budget Ordinance, in the form of a paper original and an electronic copy with the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers and to the committee coordinator for the law, justice, health and human services committee or its successor.