

Memorandum

To: Robert W. Wilson, Cass County Administrator and
Tracy Peters, Assistant Cass County Administrator

From: Constance L. Cleveland, District Judge

Date: 6/12/2024

Re: Veterans Treatment Court Project – follow-up

I am requesting that the Veterans Treatment Court Project be placed on the Agenda for the Cass County Commission on June 17, 2024.

The prior agenda item was a non-action/information item on May 6, 2024. I will be asking for a statement of support - for the Petition to the Interdisciplinary Special Dockets Committee.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE PROJECT?

I will be submitting the petition to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Specialized Dockets of the North Dakota Supreme Court to create a Veterans Treatment Court in the East Central Judicial District. This will be a post-adjudication, intensive supervised probation court and will adopt the model from the Grand Forks Veterans Treatment Court. The submission of the petition was delayed by about a month as the subcommittee of the Cass County Commission did not convene until June 5, 2024

So far, the East Central Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court Petition has verbal commitments for support from defense attorneys, parole and probation, the local VA - Veterans Justice Officer, Traill County State's Attorney, Veterans Service Officers (in Cass and Traill Counties), Lonnie Wangen of the ND Department of Veterans Affairs, and Major General Alan Dohrmann. Additionally, Judge Stephanie Hayden has agreed to support this project and provide her expertise as a judge with a background of military service.

WHY APPROACH THE COMMISSION?

For the past ten years individuals working with Veterans have approached the Cass County Commission requesting action on a Veterans Treatment Court. Based upon the history, I wanted to update the Commission on developments and progress. The Court will be moving forward with this initiative, based upon the statistics and information on Veterans Treatment Courts previously to the Commission.

WHAT IS THE COST TO COUNTY?

There is no request for financial support from the Project. If the Cass County States Attorney determines her office will be involved, that cost is whatever the States Attorney establishes, but that involvement is not a given. In estimating the possible cost should the States Attorney request funding, I consulted the Grand Forks State's Attorney working with their Veterans Treatment Court, and determined that to be 5% FTE. The States Attorney in Grand Forks donates that time. Currently the Defense Attorneys and Judges volunteer their time for those local Drug courts. Volunteering time would continue to be the case for the Judges participating in Veterans Court.

WHAT BENEFIT TO THE COUNTY?

The purpose of a Veterans Treatment Court is to restore court-involved veterans to active and contributing members of society by assuring they are accessing the services they have earned through service to our country. Veterans Treatment Courts have demonstrated that they are successful at reducing recidivism, and thus, reducing costs for county incarceration and repeat prosecutions.

I am requesting support from the Commission for the concept and a recognition that men and women who have served our country in the military and then face criminal charges due to drugs, alcohol, mental health or other events can benefit from a probationary status that includes mentorship and support from other veterans and the VA to get back on track and out a cycle of court involvement. The long-term benefit to the County and the State's Attorney should be lower recidivism among those who engage in this Court.

Grand Forks County has established a Veterans Treatment Court and most states have courts that are also in place and have established that they reduce recidivism. I believe there is a need in Cass County and in the East Central Judicial District based upon the number of Veterans who are involved in the criminal system and there are unique services available to individuals with prior military service.

Thank you.

Constance L. Cleveland

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REQUESTED MOTION: Move that the Cass County Commission support the filing of a Petition with the North Dakota Supreme Court's Interdisciplinary Committee on Specialized Dockets to establish a Veterans Court in the East Central Judicial District to serve court involved veterans.