



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

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

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Veterans Court Opens in Manhattan

New York – Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks was joined today by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Legal Aid Society attorney Irwin Shaw, New York City Mayor’s Office of Veterans’ Affairs Commissioner Loree Sutton, M.D., Director of VA NY Harbor Healthcare System Martina Parauda and other officials to mark the opening of a Manhattan court designed to identify veteran-offenders suffering from addiction, mental illness or co-occurring disorders and link them to treatment and services to divert them from incarceration.

The Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court, which will operate out of New York County Supreme Court-Criminal Term, is a collaborative effort of the New York State court system, the Manhattan District Attorney’s office, the defense bar, local treatment providers, the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, and other veterans’ services and support agencies and organizations.

Similar to veterans’ courts operating in other parts of the state, the Manhattan court is based on the drug court model, which combines rigorous treatment, intensive judicial monitoring and coordinated services, as well as enhanced communication among the various stakeholders.

In addition to aiding veterans on the road to recovery via access to treatment for substance abuse, PTSD and other combat-related disorders, the new court will provide a range of support services to address associated problems, such as unemployment and homelessness. To help ensure the success of participants, the court will incorporate a core element of many of its counterparts — the utilization of peer mentors, military veterans who volunteer their time to offer

court participants support and motivation as they navigate the legal process and the challenges of re-assimilating to civilian life.

Former servicemen and women who plead guilty to a felony offense that is eligible for judicial diversion in conformity with Criminal Procedure Law, are not deemed a public safety threat and are willing to comply with court-imposed conditions will be considered for participation in the program. Eligible defendants must be at least 19 years old at the time of arrest. Participation in the program is voluntary.

Once a case has been adjourned to the Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court, the court's designated resource coordinator — who serves as a liaison between the treatment provider and the court — will conduct a clinical assessment and report findings and recommendations to the judge, prosecutor and defense attorney before the defendant's first court appearance. If eligible, the veteran will plead guilty to the top charge unless otherwise approved by the prosecution. Clinical input from treatment providers will inform the duration of services. Upon successful completion of the program, participants may have their charges reduced or dismissed. If the veteran fails to meet the requirements of the program, the court will impose sanctions that may include community service, increased drug testing and jail time. Ultimate failure to complete the treatment court mandate will result in incarceration or another pre-negotiated sentence.

“I am so pleased that this innovative court model — which recognizes the sacrifices of our brave servicemen and women by addressing the post-combat injuries and other obstacles faced by returning veterans — has now been expanded to Manhattan. With the launch of this new court, eligible veterans who have become involved in the criminal justice system will have access to the customized tools and treatment they need to get back on their feet and successfully transition into civilian life. I wish to thank District Attorney Vance, Borough President Brewer, the defense bar and our other partners for their guidance, support and tireless work in making the Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court a reality,” said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

“Our city and our nation owe a great debt and much gratitude to our veterans, and my office has long pledged to do all we can within the criminal justice system to honor and respect their service. The Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court will offer an alternative to incarceration to veterans whose criminal behavior may be linked to their military service, and provide customized services, support and mentorship to address veterans' legal and mental health needs — achieving more effective and longer-term resolutions in their cases. I am proud to partner with the Office of Court Administration, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Mayor's Office, Borough President Brewer and the Legal Aid Society to open this treatment court, which

will safely reduce incarceration while helping to fulfill our obligations to the most heroic New Yorkers among us,” said Manhattan District Attorney Vance.

“After more than a year of letter-writing, phone calls, testifying, and asking every chance I could get, it’s thrilling to see Manhattan’s Veterans Treatment Court open and hearing cases,” said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer. “It’s great that we’ll finally be able to deploy the services and solutions this court can offer to the more than 30,000 veterans in Manhattan. I look forward to working with Chief Administrative Judge Marks, District Attorney Vance and Judge Bartley to get the word out and make this court as effective and successful as possible,” said Manhattan Borough President Brewer.

Hon. A. Kirke Bartley Jr., a veteran himself and an experienced criminal judge, will preside over the Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court.

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