



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 1345

Resolution calling for the creation of veterans treatment courts in every county in New York City, including the counties of the Bronx, New York and Richmond, to serve and address the increasing needs of the growing veteran population in the City.

By Council Members Eugene, Koppell, Cabrera, Dromm, Fidler, Gentile, Jackson, James, Koo, Mendez, Palma, Rose, Williams, Wills, Rodriguez, Arroyo and Ulrich

Whereas, Veterans across the United States (U.S.) are returning from deployment situations with mental health issues and concerns that should be addressed with the same care and attention as those veterans who sustained physical injuries; and

Whereas, According to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, research shows that one in five veterans exhibited symptoms of a mental disorder or a cognitive impairment, while one in six veterans who served in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq has a substance abuse problem; and

Whereas, In an effort to address the underlying mental health issues, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), that many veterans face, courts across the U.S. have begun to focus on alternatives-to-incarceration for veterans who are charged with non-violent drug offenses and in some cases, service-related crimes; and

Whereas, The country's first veterans treatment court (VTC) was established in Buffalo, New York in January 2008; and

Whereas, On July 7, 2009, New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Kings County District Attorney Charles Hynes, Queens County District Attorney Richard Brown and Nassau County District Attorney Kathleen Rice announced the launch of a collaborative effort called the "Veterans Project" for non-violent veteran offenders; and

Whereas, The program was designed “to provide outreach, specialized support services and treatment to divert them from incarceration; offer peer support to sustain engagement in services; and facilitate the exchange of information between legal, clinical and community resources”; and

Whereas, Under this program, former servicemen and women who have pled guilty to a non-violent crime, been determined not to present a threat to community safety and are willing to comply with court imposed conditions as an alternative to incarceration are considered for diversion; and

Whereas, With the opening of the Nassau County Court in November 2011, there were a total of seven veterans’ treatment courts or the functional equivalent thereof, in New York State, in Brooklyn, Buffalo, Jamestown, Queens, Rochester and Suffolk; and

Whereas, According to a published statement by District Attorney Hynes, “[i]f you’re in a county rather than Brooklyn, Queens or Nassau, you have a moral imperative to demand from your district attorney why such services aren’t in place”; and

Whereas, Veterans in all counties of the City would be better served by having equal access in their community to a viable option other than incarceration for non-violent offenses, that includes treatment, rehabilitation and services to help with readjustment to civilian life; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls for the creation of veterans treatment courts in every county in New York City, including the counties of the Bronx, New York and Richmond, to serve and address the increasing needs of the veteran population in the City.

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