



## Justice Involved Veterans Support Act

Approximately 181,000 justice involved veterans are incarcerated in the United States<sup>1</sup>. Most were not identified during their criminal proceedings to be referred to a Veteran Treatment Court (VTC) or a Veteran Justice Outreach office often due to a lack of knowledge that they can access these benefits.

- Over half of justice-involved veterans have either a mental health problem—for example, PTSD or depression—or substance abuse disorders like alcoholism or drug addiction.<sup>2</sup>
- Many justice-involved veterans are homeless or at-risk for homelessness while many others have difficulty finding work or reentering society.
- The majority of veterans in prison and jail reported were discharged from the military between 1974 and 2000.

VTCs result in far lower recidivism rates (14% in participants versus 23-46% in the general prison population).<sup>3</sup> There are approximately 500 counties with VTCs in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Preliminary research shows that participation in VTC services produce sustainable improvements in recovery and PTSD in participants.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Veterans Justice Outreach program was created to facilitate access to VA services at the earliest possible point.

These programs have already proven their value with tangible results. However, more justice involved veterans need to know they exist. The ***Justice Involved Veterans Support Act*** creates a pilot to help identify veterans involved in the criminal justice system.

### ***Justice Involved Veterans Support Act:***

- Creates a pilot program for the Attorney General in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide grants and technical assistance to state prisons and local jails to improve documentation of whether inmates are veterans.
- The goals of the pilot program are to:
  - Assist the VA Secretary in providing benefits to incarcerated veterans;
  - Assist state VA offices in providing benefits to incarcerated veterans; and
  - Increase the number of veterans involved in the criminal justice system whose cases are diverted to VTCs.
- The priority for selecting state prisons and local jail grant recipients will be based on:
  - States that contain the greatest populations of veterans per capita;
  - States with the highest rates of veterans living in poverty; and
  - Jurisdictions that contain a VTC or veterans diversion program.

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<sup>1</sup> Bronson J, Carson A, Noonan M, Berzofsky M. [Veterans in prison and jail, 2011-12](#), (December 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Mike Richman, [Veterans and the Criminal Justice System](#), Office of Research and Development, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (September 7, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Tsai, Finlay, Flatley, Kaspro, Clark, *A National Study of Veterans Treatment Court Participants: Who Benefits and Who Recidivates*, ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY MENTAL HEALTH (March 1, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Darius Jaafari, [Special Courts for Veterans Languish](#), THE MARSHALL PROJECT (February 19, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Knudsen & Windenfeld, *A Specialized Treatment Court for Veterans with Trauma Exposure: Implications for the Field*, COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH JOURNAL (February 15, 2015).