

**Kirby Hannan**  
**NYS Veterans Council**

**2021-2022 Joint Budget Committee – Public Protection**  
**Testimony 2/10/2021**

Thank you to Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, and members of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee for the opportunity to speak today. I am pleased to provide testimony on the importance of Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) and ensuring a veteran has access to a VTC in all 62 counties in New York State.

The statistics we are seeing on trauma facing veterans are alarming. The RAND Center estimates about 1 in 5 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or significant mental health needs. Also, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that as of 2014, 1 in 15 veterans have a substance use disorder.

A VTC transfer policy has garnered broad support from Governor Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. Also, the expansion through the transfer policy can be enacted without incurring any significant start-up costs. The only ancillary costs are associated with supporting travel and transportation for peer mentors and participants, training around the program model for judicial and nonjudicial staff, and peer mentor training.

Since its inception, the program has helped over 4,500 veterans; although VTCs are in counties with the largest veteran populations, capacity in those counties still need to be increased. This program is needed now more than ever because of the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, veterans in New York State were 8 times more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder and 2–4 times more likely to experience major depression than their civilian counterparts.

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