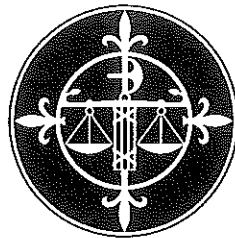


Corey R. Steel
State Court Administrator



Deborah A. Minardi
State Probation Administrator

November 25, 2019

Patrick J. O'Donnell
Clerk of the Legislature
Room 2018, State Capitol
P.O. Box 04604
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

RE: LB919A Veterans Treatment Court Viability Recommendation

Dear Mr. O'Donnell:

On April 18, 2016, the Governor approved Legislative Bill 919, amending Neb. Rev. Stat. §24-1301 to broaden the definition of problem-solving courts to include veterans, mental health, and reentry courts. LB919A was simultaneously approved and provided appropriations to establish veteran treatment courts in Nebraska. LB919A further required that by December 1, 2019, the Supreme Court report the viability of the veterans treatment court model in Nebraska and electronically submit a report to the Legislature containing the Supreme Court's recommendations concerning the continuation, expansion, or termination of such courts in Nebraska. The following letter intends to fulfill this requirement.

In response to the passage of LB919, the Nebraska Supreme Court's Problem-Solving Court Committee appointed a Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) Subcommittee to establish an implementation plan that included the development of best-practice standards for veterans treatment courts. Judges W. Mark Ashford and John Colborn led the subcommittee. In addition to several members of the judiciary, the subcommittee included the State Court Administrator, County Attorneys, Public Defenders, Probation, Community Corrections Officers, Veterans Outreach and Veterans Legal Support representatives.

In June 2016, members of the VTC subcommittee, including co-chairs Judges Ashford and Colborn, attended a four-day training provided by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. The training provided information and education on best practice standards and modes of operation applicable to Veterans Courts. Afterwards, the VTC subcommittee developed the Nebraska Veterans Treatment Court Best Practice Standards and Progression Plan.

The VTC Best Practice Standards were subsequently reviewed and vetted by Dr. Fred L. Cheesman, Principal Court Research Consultant with the National Center for State Courts. In addition, Judge Mary Jane Knisely with the Montana Veterans Treatment Court in Billings, Montana, vetted the standards and progression plan and made no additional recommendations for modification.

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The Nebraska Veterans Treatment Court Best Practice Standards and Progression Plan were also vetted and approved by the Nebraska Supreme Court Problem-Solving Court Committee prior to submission to the Nebraska Supreme Court. The Nebraska Supreme Court approved the Nebraska Veterans Treatment Court Best Practice Standards and Progression Plan in September 2016.

Six months after receiving authorization from the Nebraska Legislature and Governor, Nebraska's first Veterans Treatment Court opened on November 4, 2016, in Douglas County. On June 27, 2018, the Douglas County Veterans Treatment Court held Nebraska's first Veterans Treatment Court Graduation. Nebraska's second Veterans Treatment Court opened on April 19, 2017, in Lancaster County. The Lancaster County Veterans Treatment Court celebrated its first graduation on May 28, 2019.

Since inception, the Douglas County Veterans Treatment Court has served a total of 58 participants, 35 of whom are still participating, and 15 having successfully graduated and having their charges dismissed and rights restored. The Lancaster County Veterans Treatment Court has served 13 participants, seven of whom are still participating, and five having successfully graduated.

Nebraska Veterans Treatment Courts are designed to reduce recidivism in high-risk and high-need veterans by fostering a comprehensive and coordinated court response using early intervention, appropriate treatment, intensive supervision and consistent judicial oversight. Veterans Treatment Courts operate under a team approach in which a judge, prosecutor, defense counsel, coordinator, community supervision officer, law enforcement, treatment provider(s), Veterans Health Administration representative and other key team members work together to design an individualized program for each participant. Compliance with treatment and court orders is verified through frequent alcohol/drug testing, close community supervision and judicial interaction. Veterans Treatment Courts enhance close monitoring of participants using home and field visits. Veterans Treatment Courts utilize trained volunteer Veteran Mentors to guide and act as role models for veterans. Veteran Mentors help with readjustment issues to assist with reentry into civilian life.

It should be noted on July 1, 2019, the Nebraska Legislature and Governor appropriated additional funds to expand problem-solving courts in Nebraska. Included in this appropriation were funds to implement a veterans treatment court in Nebraska's Ninth Judicial District. Implementation planning is currently underway.

Considering the positive feedback from veterans treatment court practitioners and participant's, and the initial and ongoing education from national partners, adherence to best practice standards has proven the Veterans Treatment Court Model is viable in Nebraska. The Nebraska Supreme Court recommends the continued use of veterans treatment courts in Nebraska to include possible expansion with appropriate resources.

Sincerely,



Corey R. Steel
State Court Administrator