



News Release

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Veterans Assistance Project Marks Seventh Anniversary

A program to assist military veterans who enter the court system is marking its seventh anniversary this fall.

The Veterans Assistance Project is a combined effort of the Judiciary, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA), and the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health Services, to refer veterans to existing community services.

The program is geared toward providing services to veterans, not diverting veterans from the courts. Veterans who are charged with indictable and non-indictable offenses, other than minor traffic matters, as well as veterans who are on probation, are eligible to participate in the program.

The program began as a pilot in Atlantic County in December 2008 and is now in operation in all of New Jersey's 21 counties.

A total of 3,129 veterans have been referred for services through the program as of Sept. 30. The largest number, 1,070, are from Essex County. Hunterdon County had the smallest number with seven.

"The growth and success of the Veterans Assistance Project statewide over the past seven years means that more veterans and their families who have sacrificed to defend our country are receiving the services and support they need and deserve," Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said. "The Judiciary is pleased to work with other agencies to address the special concerns of veterans who come into contact with the criminal justice system."

Some veterans return from military service with physical, mental or personal issues, and some might turn to drugs or alcohol in an attempt to manage the stress of returning to civilian life. The Veterans Assistance Project aims to connect service members who need help with existing programs to address those issues.

Individuals are asked whether they are veterans at the point of arrest or detention, when the person is remanded to the county jail, and at initial court appearances. Persons identified as veterans are referred to the veterans service office for an assessment of their needs and then matched with existing service providers.

A video about the Veterans Assistance Project can be found at youtube.com/njcourts.

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