

Wounded Warrior Project
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July 13, 2017

Mr. Richard Cassidy
President
Uniform Law Commission
111 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 1010
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mr. Cassidy:

As an organization that serves, honors, and empowers veterans who have been wounded, ill, or injured since September 11, 2001, Wounded Warrior Project (“WWP”) is acutely aware of the difficulties veterans face beyond the visible wounds of war. WWP has taken special care to acknowledge and generate awareness of the invisible wounds veterans endure such as TBI, PTSD, and other mental health challenges. These wounds manifest in many ways and sometimes lead veterans into court appearances as defendants.

WWP supports veterans treatment courts (“VTCs”) as an alternative to a traditional court system that may not consider both the sacrifices veterans have made and the unique challenges associated with conditions like PTSD and TBI. Existing VTCs have a better understanding of the specific needs of justice-involved veterans and have leveraged resources from drug and alcohol treatment, mental health therapy, and peer mentorship to education and counseling related to Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”) programs and services. By combining these resources with an overarching system of accountability, akin to the structure veterans had while in uniform, these courts encourage and enable recovery far better than jail or prison ever could. More than 400 VTCs and veteran-focused court programs are operating across the United States, and demand for new courts continues to grow¹.

For these reasons, WWP was proud to accept an invitation to become an Official Observer to the Model Veterans Court Act Drafting Committee. Throughout the drafting process, the committee was open and amenable to the input and counsel of observers, and its final draft reflects a combination of thorough consideration and compassion for the brave men and women who have served in our nation’s Armed Services. We hope that the policies advanced in the Model Veterans Treatment Court Act will build upon successes already being seen across the country, including reduced jail time and recidivism, and improved mental health recovery and successful re-entry for veterans into the community.

Of particular note, WWP is pleased that the Model Veterans Treatment Court Act demonstrates a commitment to serving veterans by excluding provisions that would bar those with other than honorable discharges. Such discharges sometimes occur as the result of underlying mental injuries sustained while serving this nation, and such veterans lose access to many VA benefits that can include health and professional services

¹ Flatley, B., Clark, S., Rosenthal, J., & Blue-Howells, J. (2017). Veterans Court Inventory 2016 Update: Characteristics of and VA involvement in Veterans Treatment Courts and other Veteran-focused court programs from the Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist Perspective. Washington, DC, US Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, March 2017.

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they need. VTCs may provide access to these services and then serve to rehabilitate veterans in the absence of much-needed support from VA.

Additionally, the Model Veterans Treatment Court Act incorporates the National Association of Drug Court Professionals' Ten Key Components of Drug Courts which, among other things, recognize the value of forging partnerships between VTCs and community-based organizations. WWP has been a longtime advocate for integrating clinical services with non-clinical community supports, and believes this collaborative approach improves outcomes for veterans. Non-clinical supports are in many cases as essential for veteran's success as high quality clinical care. VTCs across the country are already building rehabilitative plans that combine clinical care with local social programming, and we hope see those efforts continue to grow in the future.

In closing, we find the Model Veterans Treatment Court Act and Model Veterans Treatment Court Rules are consistent with WWP's efforts to support veterans through hardships and injuries, especially those with invisible wounds of war. Many of the veterans we serve have benefited from VTCs, and we hope that others in need will have the opportunity to benefit in the future. We sincerely appreciate the contributions of all those who served on the Model Veterans Court Act Drafting Committee and encourage all members of the Uniform Law Commission to support the Model Veterans Treatment Court Act.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Linnington
Chief Executive Officer
Wounded Warrior Project

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