



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
GARY HEBL
46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Veterans Courts Provide a Tailor-Made Approach to Helping Veteran Offenders

By Rep. Gary Hebl

Veterans Court programs have been operating in Wisconsin since 2009. Even more recently, since October 2014, there has been a Veterans Treatment Court operating in Dane County. What are Veterans Court programs?

The development of a Veterans Court program in Wisconsin began when the offices of the State Public Defender and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs met with Judge Robert Russell, founder of the nation's first Veterans Treatment Court in Buffalo, New York. Now, 16 programs operate in 33 counties.

The Veterans Treatment Court in Dane County promotes recovery and stability through treatment for addiction and mental health issues.

If a veteran has been or is about to be charged with a crime, and it appears that a part of the problem is a need for treatment, the veteran can petition a County Veteran Service Officer to verify his or her eligibility for treatment with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Eligibility typically includes:

- Service in the United States Armed Forces, including Reserves and National Guard;
- Qualification for Veterans Service Benefits; and
- Demonstration of a need for treatment.

What happens after verification? To determine treatment needs, a veteran must complete an assessment by the VA, follow through on treatment, and appear before the Veterans Court judge on a regular basis.

A crucial aspect of the Veterans Court Treatment Program is the use of mentors, who are themselves veterans. Each veteran is assigned a volunteer "Vet Mentor" from the community who maintains contact with the veteran to offer encouragement and support.

The Dane County Veterans Court is available to veterans at both the pre-judgment and the post-judgment stages. Pre-judgment participants, upon successful completion of the treatment plan (typically 12-18 months), will have their original charges dismissed or reduced. Post-judgment participants will have the opportunity to take part in the court's process as part of their probation.

Another helpful resource for Dane County veterans with civil (rather than criminal) legal problems is the UW Law School's Veterans Law Center. The center provides free help with civil legal problems like divorce proceedings, child custody claims, housing issues, and unemployment benefits. The Law Center serves low-income veterans and their families on a walk-in basis from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. on the second Thursday of every month at Madison's City-County Building, 210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., and from 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month at Porchlight, Inc., 306 N. Brooks Street in Madison. Starting in June, the hours at Porchlight will shift to 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

These programs can be useful resources for any veteran dealing with the judiciary through treatment, mentorship, and helpful services. If you or someone you know may be interested in taking advantage of Dane County's Veteran Treatment Court Programs, I encourage you to visit <https://www.countyofdane.com/court/alternative/veterans.aspx> for information. As always, please do not hesitate to use my office as a resource for any help you may need. My door is always open to you.

Rep. Gary Hebl represents the 46th Assembly District, which includes the cities of Sun Prairie and Stoughton, the village of Cottage Grove, and the townships of Cottage Grove, Dunkirk, Pleasant Springs, and Sun Prairie.

Contact Rep. Hebl with any questions or concerns you may have at (608) 266-7678 or via email at Rep.Hebl@legis.wi.gov.

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