

Testimony of Terry J Wheeler

January 11, 2016

Before the Commission to Strengthen and Align the Services Provided to Maine's Veterans

Senator Collins, Representative Golden and honorable members of Commission to Strengthen and Align the Services Provided to Maine's Veterans: My name is Terry J Wheeler and I am a case manager from Maine Pretrial Services and a board member of the Veteran Mentors of Maine. I would like to share my experiences working with The Co-occurring Disorders and Veterans Court (CODVC).

The CODVC is currently serving fourteen (14) Veterans with six (6) more Veterans that are pending admission. This court has served 36 justice-involved vets since the court was opened in 2011. The program length is a minimum of 1 year. The CODVC team consists of Justice Nancy Mills, two treatment representatives from Kennebec Behavior Health, a Department of Corrections Probation Officer, the Veterans Justice Outreach Worker from the Veterans Administration (VA), a court clerk and Case Managers from Maine Pretrial Services. We have served Veterans from almost every county in the State of Maine, including York and Aroostook. We have never denied a case from another county based solely on the Veteran's location and inability to relocate or commute to Kennebec County.

It is my understanding that the Commission is looking for the program's experience regarding gaps in services that challenge the Veterans served by the Veteran's Court. These are some of the current issues experienced by the Veteran's in the CODVC.

1. The court works closely with the VA and has been very successful in getting clients outpatient treatment for both Mental Health and Substance Abuse problems. We have been challenged placing Veterans in need of inpatient treatment for both long term and short term Mental Health and Substance Abuse treatment inside the State of Maine. The VA looks to place Veterans who need of a higher level of care in facilities outside the state. This can lead to a disconnect between these Veterans and the supports that the Veterans Court has to offer.
2. The Veterans Court works with one Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) worker that is responsible for the referral of services to all Veterans Court clients as well as the referral and connection to services for all justice-involved Veterans in the State of Maine. There is a need for more VJOs in the State of Maine. The geographic expanse alone should justify this.
3. Veterans do not have access to in home supports or daily living skills staff in the community. There is a program at the VA Togus that reports to offer these services but the Veterans Court has not been able to access them for any of the clients that needed those services while in court. Because the VA reports that these services are offered at Togus, they have not been willing or able to pay for the community programs that offer these services.
4. There is a need to support and expand programs that offer Veteran peer mentorship, such as the Veterans Mentors of Maine and access to "same day" emergency services. Often times a Veteran will have to wait days, weeks, or months for necessities such as heating oil, housing, and transportation.