

To Whom It May Concern:

According to the opening line of the Mission Statement of the United States Department of Justice, one of my primary responsibilities as United States Attorney, is “[t]o enforce the law and defend the interests of the United States according to the law.” While my job requires me to seek just punishment for those guilty of unlawful behavior, sometimes just punishment requires something a little different.

As a lifelong prosecutor, I have sadly come to realize that our criminal justice system, with increasing regularity, finds itself coming into contact with individuals who are military veterans. Often times that contact is the result of mental health and/or drug and alcohol dependency issues related to their military service. Experience has shown that our traditional criminal justice system is ill-equipped to deal with these veterans.

We in Western New York are fortunate to be the home to the Nation’s very first Veteran’s Treatment Court. Through the innovative and downright heroic efforts of Buffalo City Court Judge Robert T. Russell, the Veteran’s Treatment Court has been in operation and serving the veterans in our community since January 2008. The mission of that Court is to habilitate veterans by diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system, and providing them with the tools needed to resume a productive and law-abiding lifestyle.

Regrettably, there has not existed any special mechanism within the Federal criminal justice system to allow veterans to have access to the array of treatment options available in courts like those run by Judge Russell...until now.

Through an unprecedented cooperative arrangement between my Office, the United States District Court, the United States Department of Veteran’s Affairs, and Judge Russell’s Veteran’s Treatment Court, I am please to announce that together we have developed a way to get certain veterans out of Federal criminal court and into the treatment they need. Under this plan, eligible offenders must agree, as a condition of a pre-trial diversion agreement, to participate in and successfully complete the local Veterans Treatment Court. If they succeed, then the charges against them will go away, but if they fail, then they will face prosecution. Through this process we are seeking a better way to provide justice to those veterans who, despite the sacrifices they made for our country, sadly find that they have brought the war home with them.

This represents the first project of its sort in any one of the 94 Federal judicial districts across this Country. In my view, this effort to help those most worthy of our honor to find justice serves as proof – “beyond a reasonable doubt” – that Western New York is truly the Community of Good Neighbors and one which I am extremely fortunate to serve.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM J. HOCHUL, JR.

United States Attorney

Western District of New York