



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## **News for Immediate Release**

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# **Nation's first online training for Veterans Courts mentors launched by Supreme Court of Pennsylvania**

**HARRISBURG** — The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania today joined state and national veterans' groups in seeking volunteers to assist former servicemen and servicewomen who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille and Justice Seamus P. McCaffery joined Michael Moreland of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and representatives of Robert Morris University at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center in outlining plans to recruit mentors in support of the state Judiciary's expanding number of Veterans Courts. Judges in those courts assign mentors to provide support and guidance to veterans caught up in the court system who are struggling with drug/alcohol, mental health and other difficulties. Pennsylvania currently has eight Veterans Courts in operation. Three additional counties have announced plans to form Veterans Courts, and at least four more courts are expected to open in 2012.

As part of the recruitment drive, it was announced today that an online training program — believed to be the first of its kind in the nation — has been launched to enhance access and increase the number of people wanting to become trained as mentors. The program was developed by AOPC staff and is being hosted at no cost to the state court system by Robert Morris University, which also has agreed to manage the site.

“Our nation has a commitment to provide whatever help we can to the brave men and women who have served our country,” Chief Justice Castille said. “This new online training program will make it easy and convenient for veterans to be part of a program to come to the aid of their fellow veterans who encounter difficulties when they return home from service. I am enormously grateful for the work of Robert Morris University in helping us develop something for Pennsylvanians that ultimately could serve as a role model for veterans' courts nationwide.

“The Supreme Court extends its gratitude to Justice McCaffery for his continuing leadership in the court system to make Veterans Courts a reality in our court's efforts to repay these veterans for their service to this nation.”

**(MORE)**

The call for volunteers and the announcement of the first-of-its-kind training program came after a meeting of the Veterans Justice Statewide Task Force, an advisory group whose 28 members include each of Pennsylvania’s three branches of state government. The Task Force’s judges, legislators and the directors of the state’s Veterans Administration Medical Centers operates under the auspices of the Veterans Justice Partnership — and oversees programming for veterans in the criminal justice system.

“This collaboration will broaden the pool of potential mentors who can help veterans with the transition to civilian life,” Justice McCaffery said. “Pennsylvania’s Veterans Courts program has a proven track record of delivering positive results for veterans, the criminal justice system and our communities.”

Pennsylvania’s Veterans Courts present an option for military veterans, charged with nonviolent crimes, to get supervised substance abuse or mental health treatment in addition to being held accountable for their actions. Pennsylvania has more than one million veterans statewide — including both Chief Justice Castille, a decorated combat veteran who served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam and Justice McCaffery, whose 40-year military career included 17 years in the Marine Corps and 23 years in the Air Force Reserve before retiring as a colonel.

More information about Veterans Court mentorship, and an application form, is available on the Pennsylvania Judiciary’s website at: <http://veterans.pacourts.us>

*(Note: Video and audio clips and digital photographs of today’s event will be available after 3 p.m. on tthe state court system’s new media kiosk at: <http://www.pacourts.us/Links/Media/PACourtsMultimediaKiosk.htm>)*

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**Media contact:** Art Heinz, 717-231-3317

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