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# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**PA VETERANS JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP ADVANCES EFFORTS TO HELP VETS:**  
**Calls for Volunteer Veteran Mentors**

**PITTSBURGH, PA, February 24, 2011**—The Pennsylvania Veterans Justice Partnership, led by Veterans Affairs Regional Director Michael Moreland and Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Seamus McCaffery, today advanced its efforts to assist veterans who are struggling with substance abuse or mental health problems and who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

McCaffery, Moreland, and veteran Tony Coppola of Pittsburgh along with his sister Fran Pollus, participated in a series of live video conference media interviews from the Pittsburgh Videotech Center in an effort to raise awareness about the Veterans Justice Partnership and inform veterans in need of the current efforts that are underway.

Justice McCaffery said, "Our Partnership is striving to get vets the help they need and deserve. We are diverting eligible vets to problem-solving 'Veterans Courts,' where they will come before a judge on a regular basis, will be supervised by a specialized probation officer and will receive treatment and other support services from the VA to address underlying problems often caused by post traumatic stress disorders. The program reduces recidivism and helps veterans avoid jail."

"This unique and powerful collaboration between VA Healthcare and the Pennsylvania Courts is designed to provide physical, social, and mental health treatment to Pennsylvania Veterans who find themselves in trouble with the law," Moreland said.

Both Moreland and McCaffery echoed the call for volunteer veteran mentors to help veterans in need.

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"These efforts are unique and successful, in part, because we have veterans helping veterans turn their lives around." Justice McCaffery said. "Many of our Veterans' Court judges and all of our peer mentors are veterans themselves but, we need more volunteer mentors to expand these efforts."

The mentors support the vets with a variety of problems and help get them back on their feet. They are assigned by judges to talk to vets about what they are going through, support them, and help reignite the pride and passion of being a veteran.

"I spent 40 years in the military, 17 in the Marine Corps and 23 in the Air Force," Justice McCaffery said, "We leave no one behind. If vets would like to give back, they should consider becoming a volunteer mentor."

Veterans who want to help other veterans in need can volunteer at a newly created Web page at [www.pacourts.us/T/AOPC/](http://www.pacourts.us/T/AOPC/) or call 215-560-6300.

"For many of these Veterans," Moreland added, "The underlying problem is an untreated mental or physical health problem—like post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or an addiction. This kind of program can help veterans turn their lives around by giving them treatment, not just jail time. It's the right thing to do for Veterans and their families and it can save local taxpayers thousands of dollars in the costs of incarceration and future criminal activity."

More information is available at the Veterans Affairs Web page set up for the program: <http://www.visn4.va.gov/veterans-justice/>.

According to the Pennsylvania State Data Center, there were approximately one million veterans in the state in 2007. Allegheny has the highest veteran population of any county in Pennsylvania with 142,638, followed by Philadelphia with 123,365, and Montgomery with 70,232.

The Veterans Justice Partnership is growing. There are three operational Veterans' Courts in Pennsylvania (Allegheny, Philadelphia, and Lackawanna counties), and fifteen additional counties at some phase in planning. Every VA Medical Center has trained staff dedicated to working with the criminal justice system and justice-involved veterans.

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