



NEWS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Christina L. Ryba
Administrative Judge
Third Judicial District**

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Date: November 7, 2025

Ulster County Launches Veterans Treatment Court

KINGSTON, NEW YORK—Third Judicial District Administrative Judge Christina L. Ryba announced the opening of the Ulster County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC), a problem-solving court targeting justice-involved veterans charged with misdemeanors and felonies who may be suffering from addiction and mental health issues. The new VTC, located in the Ulster County Courthouse, 285 Wall Street, Kingston, New York, is a partnership of the court system's Third Judicial District, the Ulster County District Attorney's Office, the local defense bar, the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Ulster County Department of Probation, and local service providers, among others. The court system's Office for Justice Initiatives, Problem Solving Justice Division, led by Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Edwina G. Richardson, and Judge Debra J. Young, Statewide Coordinating Judge for Problem-Solving Courts, have been involved throughout the planning and implementation of the new VTC. The Honorable Bryan Rounds will preside over the new court.

"The launch of the Veterans Treatment Court reflects the Third Judicial District's deep commitment to addressing the unique needs of those who have served our country. Through a combination of accountability and compassion, this court will provide veterans, many of whom are battling addiction or mental health challenges, with the support and structure necessary for positive outcomes," said Judge Ryba.

"Our Veterans Treatment Courts play such an important role in our justice system, with so many of our justice-involved veterans suffering from a substance abuse and/or mental health disorder. VTCs are built upon local, sustainable community networks to help our justice-involved veterans. The Third Judicial District has gone above and beyond in this regard by building the infrastructure needed to serve New York's justice-involved veteran population. I congratulate the Ulster County community for coming together to build this court and I applaud Administrative Judge Christina Ryba and Judge Rounds for their leadership. I also extend my gratitude to the incredible peer mentors whose military experience and dedication will be instrumental to the court's success," said Judge Richardson.

"Those who serve our country most bravely often return home to find their lives made more difficult due to mental health and substance abuse issues directly related to their service. Veterans Treatment Courts are acutely aware of issues that are unique to military life, and as such are well positioned to offer rehabilitative options to our justice-involved veterans. I am excited for the opening of this court and am so grateful to those that helped bring it to fruition," said Judge Young. "With Judge Rounds at the helm, I am confident that we will be able to help Ulster's veteran community rebuild with dignity and hope."

“Being the Presiding Judge of the very first Veteran’s Treatment Court in the history of Ulster County, is one of the great honors of my professional life and the fulfillment of a dream I had long before becoming Ulster County Judge. It is only possible through the commitment of the veterans who have, and continue to, sacrifice so much in the service of others. I am grateful to and humbled by them.”

Veterans Treatment Courts divert appropriate cases of justice-involved veterans, offering substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and other customized services as an alternative to conventional prosecution and incarceration. The VA’s Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, veteran peer mentors, veteran services providers, probation, and other organizations work collaboratively to effectively address both the unique needs of justice-involved veterans, which include a review of VA benefits and services. Key features of the VTC model include rigorous treatment services, intensive judicial monitoring, collaboration, and coordination among the various community partners. Additionally, an important component in ensuring a successful VTC is the use of peer mentors, military veterans who volunteer their time to offer support and motivation to justice-involved veterans.

Veterans who are not considered a public safety risk and are willing to comply with court-imposed conditions will be considered for participation in the new Ulster County VTC. All military discharges will be considered, including prior or current service from the US Armed Forces, Reserves and National Guard. Referrals for the VTC can be made by defense counsel, prosecutors, clinicians, probation, veteran service agencies and other sources. All referrals will be vetted by the Ulster County District Attorney’s Office and the respective defense attorney. Veterans will be assessed to determine eligibility for substance abuse, healthcare, housing, clinical services, and benefits. Participants may have their charges reduced or dismissed upon successful completion of treatment and other court requirements.

The Ulster County Public Defender's Office is proud to be an active participant in the Veterans Court program recently established. Working in conjunction with the Ulster County Court, the District Attorney's Office, the Veterans Services Agency and Veterans Affairs, we are providing more individualized attention to the unique challenges facing those who have selflessly served our country and as a result may be facing challenges in their encounters with the criminal justice system. The spirit of cooperation for the good of those veterans now in need makes this program a true boon to this County,” said Public Defender Elizabeth Corrado.

“The establishment of Ulster County Veterans Court dedicated to veterans charged with certain criminal offenses has been long overdue. I am grateful that it is now here, thanks to the efforts and collaboration of the Ulster County Court (Hon. Bryan Rounds), Veterans Services, Public Defender’s Office, Probation Dept., and the District Attorney’s Office. This court will play a vital role in connecting veterans to services and support available within our community. As Ulster County’s District Attorney, I firmly believe that this special court will foster the exercise of mercy, discretion, and accountability within the contexts and circumstances that are often unique to veterans,” said District Attorney Emmanuel C. Nneji.

The current point of contact for VTC referrals is VTC Coordinator Heidi Peratikos, who may be reached at hperatik@nycourts.gov.

The country’s first VTC was launched in Buffalo, New York in 2008, serving as a national model. With the launch of the Ulster County VTC, there are now 38 VTCs operating in 29 New York counties encompassing urban, suburban, and rural communities.

For more information about New York’s VTCs and other problem-solving courts, visit: https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/problem_solving/