

NEWS RELEASE

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

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PRESIDING JUDGE JOHN K. STEWART INVITES SF MAYOR TO VETERANS JUSTICE COURT GRADUATION TO WITNESS HOW THE COURT HELPS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF SAN FRANCISCANS

Criminal Charges Dropped Against Six Veterans After Successful VJC Program

SAN FRANCISCO -- Today six veterans successfully completed the Veterans Justice Court (VJC), one of San Francisco's collaborative court programs that promotes public safety and helps defendants return to productive, crime-free lives.

"This is a special court that is a real asset to our City," Presiding Judge John K. Stewart told the graduates today in the courtroom. "Judge Jeffrey Ross and the Veterans Justice Court Team have done a great job in helping all of you get back on track and lead the lives we know you want to live."

Working with the San Francisco Department of Public Health and the Veterans Administration, San Francisco's Veterans Justice Court provides drug treatment, job training, mental health counseling and other services to assist participants to overcome addiction, to repair family relationships, to secure and maintain housing and employment, to avoid reoffending and to return as productive members of society.

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VJC/SFSC
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“Recognizing the contribution our military veterans made to our country, it is most appropriate on this Memorial Day Weekend, that we celebrate these six men who have successfully availed themselves of our Court’s services to address the challenges they face,” Judge Ross said. “Our criminal justice system works to assure that our City and its residents are safe and their property is protected. Research and experience confirm that treating drug addiction and mental illness and addressing homelessness are critical to preventing crime. Where appropriate participants commit to changing their lives, our collaborative courts provide these necessary services together with constant judicial monitoring to assure that people can lead productive, crime-free lives and benefit themselves, their families and our community.”

Jenna Ferrara, Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist with the VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, said, “The VJC is a collaborative court that addresses the underlying issues that have put veterans in contact with the criminal justice system. Oftentimes, VJC participants are engaged in treatment for far longer than they would be in jail and they receive consistent oversight from the Court and contact with treatment providers. By addressing the root of the issue, collaborative courts assist individuals with engaging in treatment that leads them to healthier lifestyles.”

Graduate Joe Marrable, 54, a U.S. Army veteran, thanked Judge Ross today for the VJC program, which helped him overcome a drug addiction that led to criminal behavior, difficulty holding a job and lack of responsibility. “I’d just like to say thank you to ... everyone who had a part in my recovery. I’m blessed to be here (in the VJC).”

Later outside the courtroom, Marrable praised the VJC. “It kept me on point – how to be responsible, taking care of your business and keeping me focused on myself and thinking about responsibilities like appointments, grandkids, my son and mother. It’s a different story now. There’s nothing negative behind me. It’s like doors opening up. I was looking for this a long time ago. I was just waiting for the right moment to come. And it came. I’m not turning back.”

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VJC/SFSC
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Judge Stewart invited Mayor Ed Lee to attend the graduation and actually observe a collaborative court in action. The mayor was unable to attend.

Launched as a pilot program in April 2013, the VJC expanded from serving veterans arrested in the Tenderloin and surrounding area to serving veterans citywide in December 2014. Judge Stewart assigned Judge Ross to preside over the citywide program in January 2015. Since its inception, 71 vets have graduated from the program, which is the result of collaboration among criminal justice partners and the VA healthcare services.

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