## Sample Op-Ed for Veterans Day

***Treatment Courts Honor Those Who Served***

This Veterans Day, as we pause to pay tribute to those who bear the burden of safeguarding our freedom, we must ensure that our gratitude is extended to all veterans, even those who have had difficulty at home and become involved in the justice system. Our [veterans] treatment court is part of a growing network of programs that prove we can reduce crime and save taxpayer dollars while ensuring that veterans in the justice system receive the right combination of accountability and treatment to get their lives back on track.

Most veterans are strengthened by their service and are vital members of the community. In fact, research shows veterans are more likely than non-veterans to be civically engaged: more likely to vote, volunteer, give to charity, work with neighbors to fix problems in the community, and attend public meetings. But we also know that when conditions such as traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress are left untreated, veterans can struggle to engage with their families and communities, resulting in some cases with justice involvement.

Traditionally, justice-involved veterans have been scattered throughout the justice system, making it difficult to coordinate effective treatment interventions. Treatment courts help solve this problem by identifying veterans in the justice system and linking them with resources and mentoring uniquely designed for the distinct needs that can arise from military service. Through this approach, we can bring to bear the myriad of local, state, and federal resources exclusive to veterans, including from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as well as state departments/commissions of veterans affairs, vet centers, veteran service organizations, volunteer veteran mentors, and other support organizations.

*[If possible, include a story of a veteran graduate here. Include briefly their service history, what led to their involvement in the justice system, how the program assisted them.]*

[*For veterans treatment courts:* One of the keys to veterans treatment court success has been volunteer veterans from the community who serve as mentors to veterans involved in the program. By pairing struggling veterans with a volunteer veteran mentor, our court gives both parties the chance to reclaim a sense of honor, duty, and leadership—values that make our veterans the backbone of American society. In serving as mentors, volunteer veterans find a sense of fulfillment and empowerment that can only be achieved when one veteran comes to the aid of another.]

Honoring our veterans means ensuring that they have stable housing, employment, and education opportunities. It means treating their invisible wounds of war just as earnestly as we would treat their physical wounds. When substance use and mental health disorders lead veterans into the justice system, the proper response should be to determine whether justice would be best served by diverting them into a treatment court where they can receive the appropriate wraparound services and supervision.

After all, veterans fought for our freedom. Shouldn’t we fight for theirs?