

## HISTORY OF VETERANS COURTS

- 2008** Associate Judge Robert Russell, Buffalo City Court, Buffalo, NY, establishes the nation's first Veterans Court. He noticed that Veterans required additional services and accountability. He integrated veterans' services (typically provided at no-cost by the USDVA) into a separate docket and included Veterans' Mentor program. The mentors are a corps of Veterans who serve as accountability partners for Veterans involved in the Veterans Court program.
- April 2010** Circuit Court Judge Tracy McCooey, Montgomery County, AL, initiates Alabama's first Veterans Court. The county jail administrator interviews each inmate upon entry (using the same questionnaire used by Judge Russell) to identify Veterans who may need assistance. Based on the information derived from the intake sheets, Judge McCooey assigns the Veteran to her drug or mental health court docket. She then enlists the services of a Veterans' Advocate employed with the Tuskegee VAMC (Harding Carr). Mr. Carr counsels the Veteran, searches for available VA benefits, and helps the Veteran access any VA medical/treatment services for which he/she is eligible.
- 2011** City of Birmingham Municipal Judge Andra Sparks establishes the state's first traditional (and municipal) Veterans Court with its own separate docket.
- July 2011** Judge McCooey, Alyce Spruell (then Immediate Past President of the Alabama State Bar), Sandy Speakman (General Counsel, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs), Amy Hinton (Political Scientist, MPA) and Col. Bryan Morgan (then General Counsel, Alabama Military Department) meet at the Alabama State Bar to discuss the possibility of creating a statewide task force to study the feasibility of Veterans Courts in Alabama and to increase its interest throughout the state.
- Aug 5-6, 2011** Amy Hinton, Sandy Speakman, and Alyce Spruell, in separate presentations, brief the concept of Veterans Courts to the ASB Military Law Symposium, University of Alabama School of Law. Ms. Hinton shares her statistical data on justice-involved Veterans with the attendees, while Ms. Speakman and Ms. Spruell explain Veterans Courts and their need in Alabama. Feedback is positive, and several attendees volunteer their support to this effort.
- Aug 10, 2011** The ADVA hosts first meeting of the Alabama State Veterans Treatment Court Task Force at the Alabama State Bar with W. Clyde Marsh, ADVA Commissioner, presiding. The over 30 attendees include the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections Kim Thomas, the Montgomery City Public Safety Director Christopher Murphy, representatives from the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) and the Chief Justice's Office, legislators, and mental health professionals. The group agrees to support the effort and establishes committees to study identified areas of growth and impact.
- Fall 2011** Then Chief Justice Chuck Malone specifically identifies Shelby County Circuit Court, Judge Bill Bostick, as a pilot Veterans Court site.

- Dec 2011** Shelby County Circuit Court (Judge Bill Bostick) earns Veterans Treatment Court Planning Initiative grant to observe Judge Robert Russell and to train at the Buffalo VTC.
- April 2012** Shelby County Veterans Court Team attends training in Buffalo, NY.
- Fall 2012** Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) designates pilot sites: Baldwin, Madison, Marshall, Pike, Russell, St. Clair, Shelby, and Tuscaloosa.
- Nov 2012** Shelby County holds its first Veterans Court docket.
- Dec 2012** St. Clair County Veterans Court (Circuit Judge Phil Seay) earns a Veterans Treatment Court Planning Initiative grant to train at the Tulsa (OK) Veterans Court.
- June 2013** St. Clair County attends training in Tulsa.
- July 2013** Russell County District Court (Judge David Johnson) graduates 3 Veterans.
- August 2013** Marshall County District Court (Judge Tim Riley) graduates 1 Veteran.
- Nov 7, 2013** Shelby County graduates its first Veterans Court class.
- Dec 13, 2013** St. Clair County graduates its first Veterans Court graduate.
- Dec 2, 2013** Alabama State Bar creates Veterans Treatment Court Task Force to assist in the expansion and further development of services to Veterans and their families.
- Dec 10, 2013** Governor Bentley establishes through Executive Order the Alabama Executive Veterans Network, known as "AlaVetNet", and creates the Legal Services Committee. This committee commits to developing and expanding Veterans Courts statewide.
- Feb 11, 2014** USDVA awards the inaugural 2013 Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award for State Innovative Programs to the ADVA for the work of the Alabama State Veterans Treatment Court Task Force.

Source: Sandra Ingram Speakman, General Counsel, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs

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