

## ***A Layman's Guide to Mercer County's Veterans Court Treatment Program***

### ***What is Veterans Court?***

- ☞ Veterans Court is a specialized treatment program designed to assist Veterans of the Armed Forces who are facing criminal charges or charged with violating the conditions of their parole or probation.
- ☞ Veterans Court helps Veterans overcome many different problems. Veterans may encounter the criminal laws due to drug and alcohol issues; or due to certain mental health issues, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression, Anxiety, interpersonal issues, such as Anger Management, or other conditions.

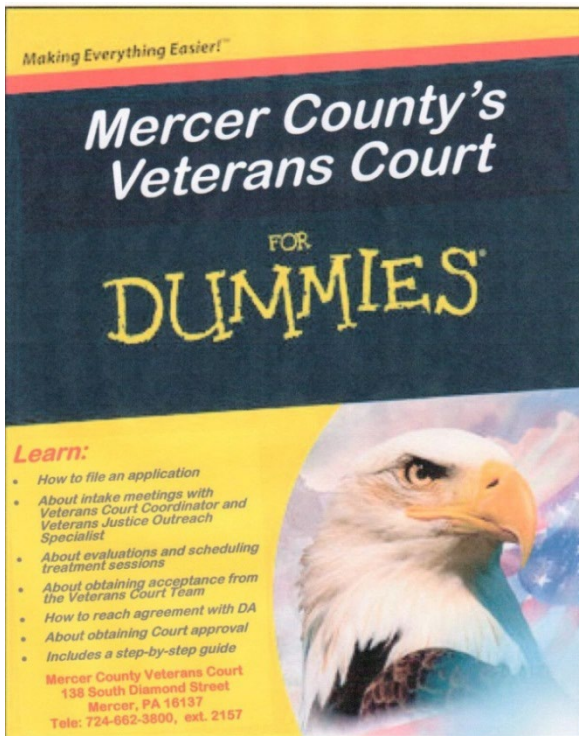
- ☞ Veterans Courts are presided over by a Judge, assisted by a Team composed of veterans, and professionals from the criminal justice system, the Veterans Administration, and treatment providers.

### ***Why are Veterans Courts needed?***

- ☞ Veterans have served our Nation when we needed them – now we have the opportunity to serve our Veterans when they need us.
- ☞ Statistically, Veterans Courts have a far greater success rate than any of the other community-based treatment program.
- ☞ Because of their strict military background, Veterans are accustomed to discipline, to receiving and obeying orders, to the hard work necessary to accomplish a goal. Therefore, Veterans make ideal candidates and respond favorably to a strictly regimented treatment program.
- ☞ Each Veteran is assigned a Mentor who has received training about the roles and duties of a Mentor and who is either currently serving on active duty or is an honorably discharged veteran. The Mentor has frequent contact with the Veteran to assist the Veteran as he or she navigates through the treatment program.

### ***How long is the Veterans Court program?***

- ☞ The treatment program lasts approximately 24 months and is similar to the basic training and advanced individual training military personnel receive in the Armed Forces—it is very intense with treatment sessions, written assignments, community service projects, frequent court appearances, and drug and alcohol testing. It shapes the Veteran up!
- ☞ The aftercare program is approximately 12 months during which the Veteran applies the lessons he or she learned during the first 12-month+ treatment program—it involves occasional check-ins and testing—to verify that there have been no relapses.



## ***A Layman's Guide to Mercer County's Veterans Court Treatment Program***

***Why would anyone ever volunteer to participate in a strictly disciplined and regimented treatment program like Veterans Court?***

- ☞ ***Because*** Veterans and those currently serving in the Armed Forces previously volunteered to participate in a strictly disciplined and regimented life-style when they volunteered to enter the Armed Forces.
- ☞ ***Because*** individuals participating in Veterans Court improve their health, both physically and emotionally, thus leading to happier and more productive lives.
- ☞ ***Because*** individuals completing Veterans Court have a much higher chance of a successful long-term outcome than can be expected from traditional community-based treatment programs.

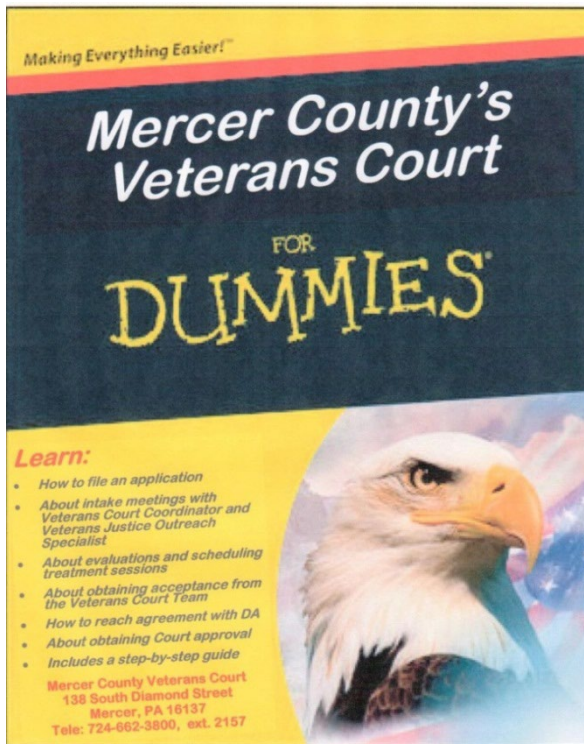
☞ ***Because*** individuals participating in Veterans Court meet and bond with fellow Veterans who themselves are participating in the Veterans Court program—fellow Veterans who have faced and defeated the same enemies that the participating Veteran is now facing, fellow Veterans who can help when help is needed. These Veterans experience the same comradery that they experienced when they were assigned to a tight-knit unit while in the Armed Forces.

☞ ***Because*** individuals who successfully complete the Veterans Court program may have the criminal proceedings pending against them resolved favorably to them, and that resolution is agreed to by the prosecution, the Veteran, and the Presiding Judge before the Veteran enters the Veterans Court program. Such a resolution might involve:

- ➔ Reduced criminal charges.
- ➔ Reduced terms of probation.
- ➔ Reduced sentence.
- ➔ Avoiding incarceration.
- ➔ Avoiding significant mandatory fines.
- ➔ Dismissal of some or all of the criminal charges.

☞ ***Interested?*** — Contact:

Ariel Coupland  
Veterans Court Coordinator 138  
South Diamond Street Mercer, PA  
16137  
724-662-3800, ext. 2425  
[acoupland@mercercountypa.gov](mailto:acoupland@mercercountypa.gov)



## ***A Layman's Guide to Mercer County's Veterans Court Treatment Program***

### ***You are probably qualified to participate in Veterans Court if...***

- ☞ You are you currently serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.
- ☞ You are a Veteran, entered the Armed Forces *before* September 7, 1980, served on active duty at least one day after basic training, and received either an Honorable or General Discharge.
- ☞ You are Veteran, entered the Armed Forces *on or after* September 7, 1980, served on active duty at least 24 continuous months, and received either an Honorable or General Discharge.

- ☞ You are Veteran, entered the Armed Forces on or *after* September 7, 1980, served on active duty *less* than 24 continuous months due to an injury, and received either an Honorable or General Discharge.
- ☞ You are **not charged** with a homicide or a serious sexual assault offense.
- ☞ You do not have a long criminal history of serious assaultive offenses.
- ☞ You are eligible to receive treatment at a Veterans Administration HealthCare facility.

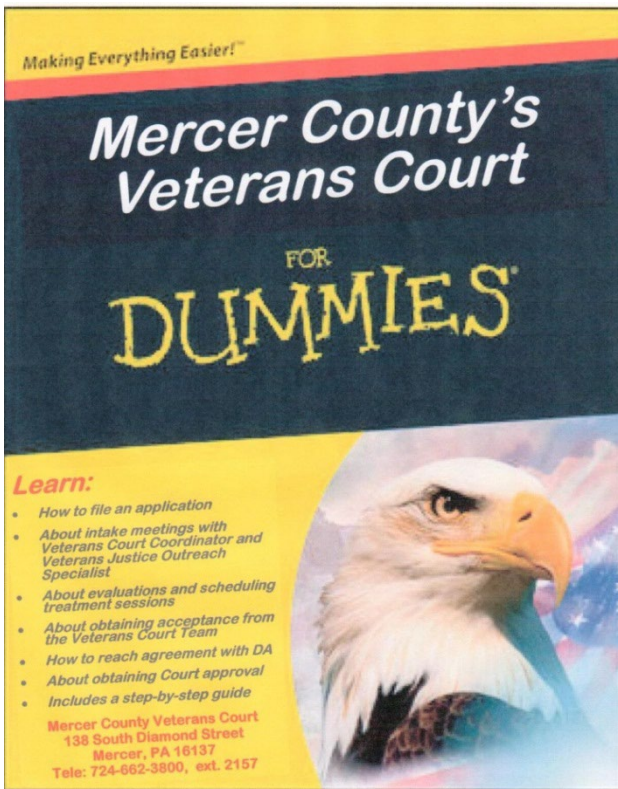
### ***You are probably not qualified to participate if...***

- ☞ You have a Dishonorable, Bad Conduct, or Other than Honorable Discharge.
- ☞ You are charged with a homicide or a serious sexual assault offense.
- ☞ You have a long criminal history of serious assaultive offenses.

### ***You are a good candidate for Veterans Court if...***

- ☞ You are willing to participate in a disciplined, intensive, rehabilitative regimen lasting at least 12 months—similar to the basic training and advanced individual training you received in the Armed Forces.
- ☞ Following the 12-month+ rehabilitative regimen, you are willing to participate in a period of aftercare lasting approximately 12 months in which you apply the lessons you learned during the first 12-month+ rehabilitative regimen.
- ☞ You are willing to follow orders, to assume responsibility, to become a leader, and to volunteer your time and talents to benefit others.
- ☞ You are willing to join and bond with fellow Veterans – to accept assistance from them to help you in your rehabilitative struggles – to assist them in their struggles to rehabilitate themselves. In other words—to be a member of a team!

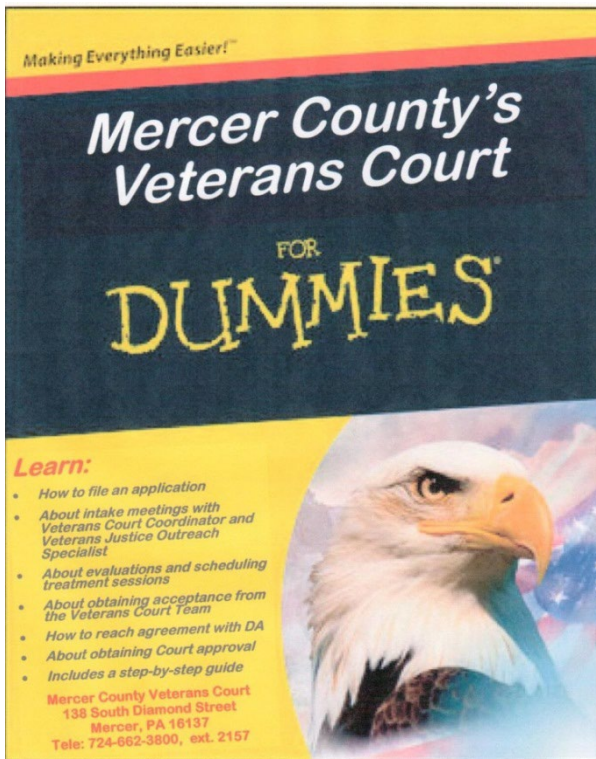




## ***A Layman's Guide to Mercer County's Veterans Court Treatment Program***

### ***The 12-Step Procedure:***

- 1.** Veteran-Defendant obtains Application from attorney or Veterans Court Coordinator.
- 2.** Completed Application, together with DD Form 214, is filed with Veterans Court Coordinator.
- 3.** Veteran-Defendant attends Intake and Orientation Meeting with Veterans Court Coordinator, receives cost estimates, and executes Medical Releases.
- 4.** Veteran-Defendant attends VA Intake Interview with the VA's Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator to determine eligibility for VA services and execute Medical Releases.
- 5.** Veteran-Defendant obtains evaluation from VA or other approved agency.
- 6.** Veteran-Defendant's attorney is notified by Veterans Court Coordinator that client is eligible or ineligible for participation in the 2-year+ Veterans Court Treatment Program
- 7.** If Veteran-Defendant is eligible, his or her attorney negotiates agreement with the prosecution regarding the disposition of the case and emails the details to the Veterans Court Coordinator at [acoupland@mercercountypa.gov](mailto:acoupland@mercercountypa.gov)
- 8.** Veterans Court Coordinator prepares and submits to Veteran-Defendant's attorney the proposed agreement documents necessary to admit the Veteran-Defendant into the 2-year+ Veterans Court Treatment Program.
- 9.** Veteran-Defendant signs documents and the Veteran-Defendant's attorney presents the documents to the Court Administrator's Office for submission to the Presiding Judge and obtains a date and time for an *Admission Hearing* (and *Plea Hearing* if applicable).
- 10.** *The Plea Hearing* . If applicable, the Presiding Judge conducts a hearing to accept Defendant's negotiated plea. (*The Plea Hearing may be held contemporaneously with the following Admission Hearing*).
- 11.** *The Admission Hearing* . The Presiding Judge conducts hearing to assure that Veteran-Defendant is knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily waiving certain rights and understands the 2-year+ Veterans Court Treatment Program.
- 12.** The Presiding Judge signs a Court Order formally admitting the Veteran-Defendant into the 2-year+ Veterans Court Treatment Program, relinquishes treatment to the Veterans Court, and authorizes the Veterans Court Judge to impose sanctions for violations, including, but not limited to, incarceration.



## ***A Layman's Guide to Mercer County's Veterans Court Treatment Program***

### ***A Typical Veterans Court Day:***

- ☞ Veterans Court occurs on Thursdays twice a month, usually every other week. A schedule of Veterans Court days is given to each Veteran, Mentor, and Team member.
- ☞ At least two weeks before a Veterans Court day, each Veteran, Mentor, and Team member receives an assignment schedule for the upcoming Veterans Court session.
- ☞ Between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm, Veterans report to the Intermediate Punishment Program (IPP) Office for drug and alcohol screens. The IPP Office is located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Courthouse Annex across the street from the Courthouse.
- ☞ At 10:00 am, Veterans selected for the MRT group sessions, meet with a counselor from the Butler Veterans HealthCare in the conference room of the Mercer County Veterans Advisory Council Building located at 138 South Diamond Street, across the street from the Courthouse. This group counseling session is private, restricted to Veterans and the VA counselor. During these sessions, Veterans discuss past experiences, personal issues, and their progress in the Veterans Court program.
- ☞ At 11:30, Veterans are encouraged to report to the Assembly Room located in the basement of the Courthouse (or other determined location) for an AA/NA meeting. Led by volunteers from the community.
- ☞ At 1:00 pm, Veterans report to the Veterans Courtroom (Courtroom No. 2) for their Veterans Court session, presided over by the Veterans Court Judge. Veterans Court sessions are conducted in a formal dignified manner, maintaining military decorum. During court sessions, Veterans present assignments and describe their progress in the treatment program. Again, Mentors are encouraged, but not required, to attend Veterans Court sessions. Veterans Court sessions last approximately one hour.
- ☞ Following court, Veterans that were selected for the afternoon group session, meet in the Mercer County Veterans Advisory Council Building. This group counseling session is private, restricted to Veterans and the VA counselor.
- ☞ During their first year, Veterans are required to continue their recommended treatment programs, attend weekly AA or NA recovery meetings, and give back to the community by performing community service. During the second year, Veterans continue their rehabilitation on their own, perform another community service project, and report fewer times to Veterans Court. At the end of the second year, the agreement on the pending criminal case previously consented to by the prosecution and the Veteran is placed into effect.