



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

NY Senate Passes Hoylman Bill to Create Universal Access to Veterans Treatment Courts

BRAD HOYLMAN-SIGAL March 24, 2021

| ISSUE: **SENATOR BRAD HOYLMAN, SD 27, VETERANS AFFAIRS, VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS**

NEW YORK—Today, the New York State Senate unanimously passed legislation ([S.1957-A](#)) sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman (D/WF-Manhattan), chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to create universal access to veterans treatment courts in New York. Veteran treatment courts, which originated in Buffalo in 2008, provide veteran-defendants suffering from addiction or mental illness with links to specialized services as a diversion from the traditional criminal justice system. Research shows veterans treatment court participants have a one year recidivism rate 23-46% lower than found among the United States prison population at large. Under Sen. Hoylman’s legislation, qualifying veterans in every county in the state would have an opportunity to have their cases diverted from traditional criminal prosecution into the more specialized treatment path accorded by a veterans treatment court after arrest. The Assembly companion legislation, ([A.5719](#)), sponsored by Assembly Member Sandy Galef (D-Westchester, Putnam), passed on March 16.

Senator Hoylman said: “A significant number of the veterans who return from service experience severe problems adjusting to civilian life, including mental health and substance abuse issues that can lead to criminal conduct. Veterans treatment courts give women and men who’ve served our country a valuable second chance and I’m proud that with the

passage of our legislation today, every New York veteran soon will have access to this proven model of rehabilitative justice. I'm grateful to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for prioritizing the needs of veterans and hope this legislation is sent to the Governor's desk for his signature as soon as possible."

David Sandman, President and CEO of the New York State Health Foundation, said: "Getting access to treatment and a second chance shouldn't depend on where you live. New York State set a national standard when it established the first Veterans Treatment Court more than a decade ago. With Senator Hoylman's leadership, New York is again poised to lead the way in taking care of our veteran populations. We look forward to the day when all of New York's veterans have access to these lifesaving courts."

This bill will immediately and dramatically increase the number of counties in which veterans charged with criminal offenses have access to the proven benefits of a veterans treatment court. Specifically, it would direct the Office of Court Administration to establish enough veteran treatment courts to ensure that every county has at least one, or adjoins a county that has at least one. If a veteran faces charges in a county without a veterans treatment court, the case can be transferred to a treatment court in an adjoining county, unless the accused and the victim are family or from the same household.

Once in a veterans treatment court, the veterans would be assessed by the VA in their local area, enroll in a program that addresses their mental health and/or substance abuse issues, and then meets with a team including the judge, veteran mentors, and other service providers as an alternative to incarceration. From there, the judge would see the veteran regularly as they progress through their treatment program, which typically last from 12 to 16 months.

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