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County Veterans Gain New Access to Highly Successful Tucson City Court Treatment Program

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Pima County Attorney

The People's Office

The Pima County Attorney's Office has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Regional Municipalities Veterans Treatment Court ("RMVTC") in the City of Tucson. The goal is to help veterans and those currently serving in the military who have had misdemeanor violations get their lives back on track. On Wednesday, August 16th County Attorney Laura Conover was joined by Presiding Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Bergin, Green Valley Justice of the Peace Ray Carroll, and City Court Magistrate Thaddeus Semon at Tucson City Court to mark the occasion and sign the special agreement.

A full PCAO team comprised of Specialty Court Director Nahrin Jabro and Deputies Robin Schwartz and Neil Poston were present at the signing which PCAO Chief Deputy Baird Greene led after working for months to formulate an agreement under which County veterans would benefit from the highly successful City Court program. Often referenced as an early leader in the nationwide movement to address military veterans in the criminal justice system, the City Court program which launched in 2008 under Judge Mike Pollard, has unique elements including Judges, support staff, and attorneys who in some cases are veterans themselves.

This Regional Municipal Veterans Treatment Court has led the way nationally as a model for its incredibly low recidivism rates. Judge Semon says recidivism rates for specialty courts across the country hover around 50%, while numbers in the Tucson City Court Veteran's program are dramatically lower between 14% and 18%. This is to say that some 85% of veterans who come through the Court never come back to the criminal justice system again.

Pima County Attorney Laura Conover says this agreement is one of the best ways to make sure all County veterans have access to the best services available, equally.

"This is another example of a metro approach to government and to servicing the people of Pima County. The Tucson City Court had the gold standard just a block away from us, and we are so grateful that the Court agreed to accept our county veterans into their program so they can benefit right alongside city resident veterans. This is exactly the kind of cooperation that improves outcomes for all," Conover said.

Judge Semon also expressed his thoughts during the signing of the document.

"Our veterans signed up and put their lives on the line to protect our way of life. We should honor the commitment they made by giving them a second chance to do the right thing." Semon said.

Green Valley Justice Court Judge Ray Carroll believes that veterans should have the opportunity to get a fresh start in life after making a mistake.

"Local veterans deserve to have a court experience that reflects their unique status and gives them the opportunity to forge a new path forward. Men and women who served our country deserve our help when they are in the justice system to give them the resources, they need to make a small set back have a big comeback," said Justice of the Peace Ray Carroll.

Treatment offered by the court can help with mental health counseling, treatment for substance use issues, housing, employment, and other services with the Veterans Administration.

PCAO Deputy Neil Poston, a veteran himself who will continue assisting the Court as to County participants stated that to his mind, "The mentor aspect of this program is what drives down recidivism. This involves veteran mentors who believe in their veteran mentees. That connection is the path forward for these people."

The Regional Municipalities Veterans Treatment Court also currently has agreements with South Tucson, Marana, Oro Valley, Sahuarita, and the U.S. Attorney's Office to refer appropriate cases to the court. If veterans successfully complete the treatment diversion program their charges may be dropped, and their record is preserved.

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