



News Release

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For immediate release:
March 21, 2011

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Veterans Assistance Project Starts in Somerset County

A program to assist military veterans who enter the court system has started in Somerset County.

The Veterans Assistance Project is a combined effort of the Judiciary, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health Services, to provide referrals to existing community services as well as mentors for veterans.

“We are pleased to expand the Veterans Assistance Project further into central New Jersey with the addition of Somerset County and to continue our work with other agencies to address the needs of veterans who have cases in court,” Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said.

“Because veterans and their families have sacrificed much in defense of our country, the Judiciary, along with other governmental agencies and service organizations, remains ready to help veterans get the assistance they need,” Chief Justice Rabner said.

The New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will determine which veterans are assigned mentors. The mentors, active and retired veterans themselves, volunteer to work with defendants while their criminal cases are pending and afterward. They see that veterans receive assistance and try to help them avoid behaviors that may lead them back into the criminal justice system.

“Expanding this vital program to Somerset County will allow more Central Jersey veterans access to a program that can help them when they need it most,” said Maj. Gen. Glenn K. Rieth, the Adjutant General of New Jersey who oversees the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and serves as commander of the New Jersey National Guard.

“The addition of Somerset County demonstrates that we are on our way to fulfilling our commitment to ultimately bring this vital service to veterans in need in every county in New Jersey,” Maj. Gen. Rieth said.

In Somerset County, the criminal, municipal and probation divisions are participating in the program.

Some veterans return from military service with physical, mental or personal issues and may turn to drugs or alcohol in an attempt to manage the stress of returning to civilian life. The Veterans Assistance Project aims to connect service members who need help with existing programs and mentors to address those issues.

The Veterans Assistance Project was piloted in Atlantic County in the municipal courts and in the criminal division of Superior Court in December 2008.

Somerset County is the 17th county in New Jersey to participate in the project. The project also is in operation in Camden; Cape May; Cumberland; Bergen; Burlington; Essex; Gloucester; Mercer; Monmouth; Morris; Ocean; Passaic; Salem; Sussex and Union counties.

More than 680 referrals have been made in those counties since the program began.

The program is geared toward providing services to veterans, not diverting veterans from the courts. Veterans who are charged with indictable and non-indictable offenses, other than minor traffic matters, as well as veterans who are on probation, are eligible to participate in the program.

A video about the Veterans Assistance Project can be found at [youtube.com/njcourts](https://www.youtube.com/njcourts)

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