

Enrolled
House Concurrent Resolution 24

Sponsored by Representative WEIDNER; Representatives BARKER, CAMERON, ESQUIVEL, GILLIAM, HICKS, HOYLE, KENY-GUYER, MATTHEWS, MCLANE, OLSON, THOMPSON, WITT, Senators KNOPP, MONNES ANDERSON

Whereas 2013 marks the 12th straight year of the United States at war; and

Whereas there are now more than 23 million United States veterans, including approximately two million from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

Whereas the men and women of our military shoulder the burden of safeguarding our freedom; and

Whereas the United States military instills a sense of honor, duty, leadership, commitment and respect that is evident in the millions of veterans who return home to their communities as productive citizens, strengthened by their military experience; and

Whereas more than 30,000 members of the Armed Forces of the United States from Oregon have been deployed on active duty domestically and overseas since 2002; and

Whereas Oregon has experienced one of the largest mobilizations of citizen soldiers in history; and

Whereas nearly 13 percent of the overall population of the State of Oregon is made up of veterans, with more than 328,000 veterans residing in this state as of September 2012; and

Whereas veterans in Oregon and across the nation are experiencing serious reintegration issues as they grapple with such conditions such as traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, military sexual trauma and significant physical injuries; and

Whereas some of these veterans enter the legal system due in part to their combat stress and injuries; and

Whereas the first Veterans Treatment Court was created in Buffalo, New York, in January 2008, by Judge Robert Russell, who asked his local veterans' affairs medical center and volunteer veterans to join in creating a new program that would focus exclusively on ensuring that veterans who appeared in his court for nonviolent offenses were connected to their veterans' services and benefits and to mentors who understood military service and the difficulties some veterans might have in adjusting to civilian society; and

Whereas a Veterans Treatment Court judge handles numerous veterans' cases, supported by a strong interdisciplinary team, and is thus in a better position to exercise discretion and respond effectively to cases involving veterans than a judge who only occasionally hears a case involving a veteran; and

Whereas a Veterans Treatment Court judge better understands the issues that a veteran may be struggling with and is also more familiar with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, state public and private support agencies and local veterans' service organizations, all of which are the strength behind mentorship programs for veterans; and

Whereas a Veterans Treatment Court eliminates the "no one understands me" excuse and replaces it with peer support from fellow veterans to successfully complete court-mandated treatment programs; and

Whereas Klamath County and Marion County have sought federal training and each successfully launched a Veterans Treatment Court modeled after Judge Russell's program; and

Whereas there are more than 100 Veterans Treatment Courts throughout the United States, with hundreds more being planned, because the concept works; now, therefore,

Be It Resolved by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon:

That we, the members of the Seventy-seventh Legislative Assembly, strongly support ongoing judicial initiatives to create a Veterans Treatment Court in all judicial districts in the State of Oregon; and be it further

Resolved, That we encourage veterans in this state to volunteer as mentors through their local Veterans Treatment Court.

Adopted by House April 12, 2013

Ramona J. Line, Chief Clerk of House

Tina Kotek, Speaker of House

Adopted by Senate May 16, 2013

Peter Courtney, President of Senate