

Good afternoon, my name is Rick Coufal and I am a Veteran. I would like to testify this afternoon in support of the amendment to House Bill 2203, regarding establishing a state-wide Veterans court in every county. Many veterans have returned home from military service psychologically or physically broken or in many cases both. At the very least, while in the service they have been able to cope with their issues through peer support, on-site treatment and a willingness to belong and be productive in their unit. But once they leave the serve, their identity and self-worth get lost and they struggle, some seek help from the VA, some go to Family, friends, peers or resort to Alcohol and drugs to self-medicate in the hopes of finding relief and what they lost upon exiting the service. A statewide Veterans court would catch many of these "At Risk" Veterans when they first encounter civilian law enforcement and if there Violation or misdemeanor offense(s) can be routed to a local Veterans court than as part of the sentencing the Veteran who still responds to direct orders can get into the VA or other local treatment programs for help before committing more violent crimes or committing suicide. As we know all to well the number of Veteran suicides continues to grow as more veterans have given up hope and try to end their lives with a little dignity as Soldiers, sailors, Marines and Airman.

I have served with many soldiers over the years and I have seen this spiral many time, sometimes there is a safety net of a Veterans Court or the veteran is able to make it into the VA system and get help, or they get assistance from a church or community group. I have friends who were not able to cope with the hardship of returning to civilian life and they committed suicide, without ever asking for help or being diagnosed with a mental health issue. These are tragic events and we as a rationale society we must learn and accept the responsibility that goes with sending our young men and women into harms way, whether it is military service, community service (Law Enforcement, fire, Search and Rescue, etc.) we have many citizens who risk their lives and as a result may encounter mental health issues sometimes during their lifetime and we as a society need to be there to step up and assist our fellow citizens.

In summary I fully support and demand that every county on Oregon establish a Veterans court or partner together so that every at-risk veteran can be identified and referred to treatment before they become a statistic by either going to prison, committing suicide or waste away their life. Please support and generously fund a state-wide Veterans court with the capability of having sufficient treatment programs and funding to make a difference and save these valuable dedicated individuals so that they can be mended and return to a productive life as a citizen of Oregon.