

SB 2246

The North Dakota Veterans Legislative Council support is legislation.

Major General Clyde Tate head of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals often uses the phrase and I quote “secret sauce when discussing veteran treatment courts. What is this secret sauce he refers to? It refers to the volunteer veteran mentors that play an important if not key role within the veteran treatment court structure. Their importance to the successes of treatment courts is their ability to understand veterans.

The veteran when they arrived at boot camp, he or she was instantly introduced to a very structured culture totally unlike civilian culture. Major culture shock sets in! Boot camp prepares them for life in the military. Most veterans are strengthened by their service, but many of those that experienced combat service are unfortunately suffering with host of mental health issues ranging from issues to PTSD TBI substances abuse, among others. Often-times landing the veteran in the criminal justice system.

These veteran mentors understand all that. There is something about veterans when they communicate with each other. It is the telling of stories and sharing like experiences. The mentors understand this.

I am sure everyone in this room has at one time or another told someone “I understand what you’re going through”, or “that’s too bad”. The civilian has no clue as to what a veteran is experiencing and to bad is like telling them Man Up like we heard coming home for Vietnam. Veterans have a warrior mentality, believing that asking for help is a sign of weakness.

In the military were are taught to have each-others back. Part of the teaching was having “battle Buddies.” A battel buddy is a partner that is assigned to a soldier. The battle buddy is expected to assist his or her partner both in and out of combat. Besides providing company a battle buddy can save their partner’s life by noticing negative thoughts and feelings and intervene to provide help.

The volunteer veteran mentor within the veteran treatment court assumes the same role.

The veteran treatment court requires regular court appearances along with mandatory attendance at all treatment sessions along with random drug and alcohol testing if applicable. Veterans respond favorably to this structure because if we know anything its structure. Without this structure the veteran is likely to reoffend and remain in the criminal system. The court ensures that the veteran meets their obligations to themselves, the court, and their community.

Clay County District Court Judge Michelle Lawson in a story in the Forum in November 2016 said and I quote “Veterans often have a harder time coming to terms with breaking the law. “there’s more shame involved. She goes on to say that the rate of recidivism without the program is 50 to 60 percent while with the program it’s 15 to 25 percent.

The North Dakota Legislative Council strongly supports this legislation and urges a yes vote. The results will far outweigh the costs.

Thank you