



Superior court of California, County of Fresno



MEDIA ADVISORY

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The Fresno Superior Court will hold an event to commemorate the opening of the new Fresno County veterans treatment court from **3 to 4 pm, June 30, 2016 at the B.F. Sisk Courthouse, 1130 O Street, Fresno**. The event for invited veterans, dignitaries, and community stakeholders will start with the posting of colors by the VFW Post 8900 Honor Guard. Speakers include the Honorable Hillary A. Chittick, Associate Director Demitric Franklin of the VA Central California Health Care System, District Attorney Lisa A. Smittcamp, Public Defender Elizabeth Diaz, and Interim Chief Probation Officer Michael L. Elliott, who is also a former U.S. Army officer and combat veteran. A graduate of the Tulare County veterans treatment court (VTC) will share his experiences participating in this type of problem-solving program. There will be opportunities for media interviews at the event.

Judge Chittick will lead Fresno County's VTC, which is the newest of more than 230 across the country. She explained that the number has grown significantly since the first VTC started in Buffalo in 2008 because they are highly effective and result in much lower recidivism rates than traditional case adjudication. The courts coordinate judicial supervision, treatment, community assistance, and support for justice-involved veterans with unique behavioral health conditions stemming from their military service. These may include substance addiction, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, and military sexual trauma. "The focus of a veterans treatment court is to resolve the root problem that brought the individual into the justice system. This takes a sustained, coordinated effort by a large number of organizations working together," Chittick explained.

The Fresno County District Attorney's Office, Probation Department, Public Defender's Office, Fresno Superior Court, and VA Central California Health Care System, along with numerous law enforcement, veteran, social service, and community organizations, have been actively planning the VTC for nearly a year. The court began on June 17th and will meet every other week to work with selected felony and misdemeanor defendants who are veterans and enter the intense 12- to 18-month rehabilitation program as part of their sentencing. Treatment and services will be coordinated through the VA, including linkages to housing, education, and employment. Veteran mentors will provide camaraderie and assistance. The Honorable Brian Alvarez, a former U.S. Air Force officer, has been instrumental in recruiting and training a group of dedicated veteran mentors who are eager to support the VTC participants. "The network of treatment, supervision, and encouragement that the VTC provides will give veterans the structure they need to overcome their problems with the dignity and respect they deserve," Alvarez said.

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