

**VA****U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**

# News Release

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Sep. 17, 2018**President signs bill into law requiring VA to hire 50 outreach specialists to support Veterans involved in justice system**

**WASHINGTON** — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it is ready to hire an additional 50 Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists following President Trump's signing today of the [Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2018](#), a new law shoring up support services to Veterans impacted by the justice system.

The law requires VA, within one year of enactment, to hire 50 additional VJO specialists and place them at eligible VA medical centers (VAMCs); the VJO specialists will, either exclusively or in addition to other duties, serve as part of a justice team in a Veterans Treatment Court or other Veteran-focused court.

"By signing this bill into law, President Trump is demonstrating VA's commitment to supporting America's Veterans, particularly those who may be navigating difficult chapters in their lives," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Since incarceration is often linked to homelessness, mental health issues and substance abuse, the VJO specialists will help facilitate these Veterans' access to numerous VA programs and resources."

Created in 2009, VA's [Veterans Justice Outreach \(VJO\) Program](#) currently funds 314 VJO specialist positions across the U.S., including 53 added in fiscal year 2018. VJO specialists serve Veterans at earlier stages of the criminal justice process, with a three-pronged focus on outreach to community law enforcement, jails and courts.

VJO specialists at each VA medical center work with Veterans in the local criminal justice system (including but not limited to Veterans Treatment Courts), conduct outreach in jails, and engage with law enforcement by delivering VA-focused training sessions and other informational presentations. VJO specialists have served more than 184,000 justice-involved Veterans since 2009.

The first Veterans Treatment Court started in Buffalo, NY in 2008. There are now 551 Veterans Treatment Courts and other Veteran-focused courts operating in the U.S. VA is a critical partner for these courts, and VJO specialists serve as members of the courts' interdisciplinary treatment teams.

Veterans Treatment Courts are a Veteran-specific adaptation of the drug court model. Unlike traditional criminal courts, Veterans Treatment Courts are not adversarial; the judge, prosecutor, defense counsel, and others work together as a team to ensure that Veteran defendants access the treatment services they need and fulfill any other requirements imposed by the court.

For more information about the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, visit <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp>.