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## **Harris County District Attorney**

**DEVON ANDERSON**

### **District Attorney's Office to Add Prosecutors to New Misdemeanor Veterans' Court**

*Defendants avoid a criminal record after successful completion of unique and intensive treatment program.*

District Attorney Devon Anderson announced today that her office will provide several prosecutors to staff the new Misdemeanor Veterans' Court. Like the Felony Veterans' Court, which Harris County founded in 2009, the misdemeanor Veterans' Court is a specialty court program that provides veterans who are honorably discharged from their military service, with treatment, and intense court supervision in lieu of a conviction and jail time.

Misdemeanor Veterans' Court is a cooperative program between the District Attorney's Office, the County Criminal Courts at Law, the Community Supervision and Corrections Department, the Sheriff's Office, the Defense Bar, the Michael Debakey Veteran's Affairs Medical Center, and the Houston Veterans Administration Regional Office. The court is an alternative punishment option and is designed to increase public safety and reduce recidivism. Defendants, who qualify for the misdemeanor Veterans' Court are provided treatment and counseling for 6 months or more.

"Incarceration is not the best option in some cases," said DA Anderson. "Defendants who struggle with mental health issues or addiction need treatment and support to help them return to being law abiding citizens."

The court will treat up to 30 veterans at a time. All must meet strict criteria. Once the course is completed the clients will be eligible for an expunction of their Class A or B misdemeanor offense. Veterans will receive an individualized treatment plan, outpatient substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and will participate in support groups.

In order to be considered for the program, defendants must be screened and go through a psychiatric assessment to prove the connection between the criminal offense and a military related mental health issue, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

The first docket for the misdemeanor Veterans' Court will be Wednesday, February 25, 2015.

**Note:** News Conference on Wednesday February 25 at 10a.m., 1201 Franklin Street Houston, Tx 77002, 11<sup>th</sup> floor, Court 16. Interviews with Felony Veterans' Court graduates will be available. For more information contact: Camille Hepola, 713-898-7823.

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