



## Rehabilitation for veterans, not punishment, key to new docket of Cleveland Municipal Court (video)

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By

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- In a small amphitheater of the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center at Wade Park, Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Lynn McLaughlin-Murray chatted with Frank Allender Thursday about a therapy/service dog that the Lakewood veteran will soon get to help him cope with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Allender was one of five defendants appearing on the new Veterans Treatment Docket of Cleveland Municipal Court, where the emphasis is on caring and rehabilitation.

McLaughlin-Murray asked a few questions before getting down to business. *Got a name picked out? What breed? That's going to help, isn't it? Everything else going good?*

Then the judge readjusted Allender's driving privileges, which had been restricted as the result of a conviction for driving under the influence.

"See you Oct. 6," McLaughlin-Murray said before moving on; chatting up and dispensing a little rehabilitative justice for the next four defendants.

This second session of the docket was moved for the day from Cleveland Municipal Court's usual 12th-floor perch at the Justice Center downtown to Wade Park as a way of showcasing how the Veterans Treatment Docket links veterans with local resources.

The docket -- 78th in the nation, fourth in Ohio -- convenes each Thursday to handle veterans charged with misdemeanor offenses involving such issues as substance abuse (the majority of cases),

domestic relations, mental health and housing. Court officials plan to invite other area courts to take advantage of



Marvin Fong, The Plain Dealer

Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Lynn McLaughlin-Murray deals with a defendant during a special session Thursday of the court's Veterans Treatment Docket which partners with local resources to provide veterans with rehabilitative services.

### Veterans Treatment Court at Louis Stokes VA Medical Center

Cleveland municipal court held its first session inside the Louis Stokes VA Medical Center to deal with veterans legal issues.

their services.

Instead of getting jail time, the veterans are placed on probation for periods that can run from six months to a year or longer. They also are referred to in-court representatives of local rehabilitative resources, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs and Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission, and are required to return to court for compliance reports.

Additionally, defendants are assigned to volunteer peer/mentors -- fellow veterans, who assist in the search for help and track their progress.

The guidelines -- based on a model set by the first veterans court, in Buffalo, N.Y. -- were established by McLaughlin-Murray and a team of court officials, many of them veterans, after she was assigned to preside over the docket in June.

"One-stop shopping," is the way McLaughlin-Murray described its immediate vets-to-resource link available to 80 defendants on probation with the Municipal Court. These resources can include counseling, medical and legal aid, or other services designed to get a veteran back on track.

McLaughlin-Murray said she chose to set a casual tone for the proceedings. "This is not an adversarial relationship. We have discussions," she said. "It's not oppressive. It's caring, it's concerned, it's interested."

A long list of endorsements for the concept was personally delivered Thursday by federal, state and local officials, including Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, who noted that "having this court and connecting veterans with the necessary services and treatment is the right thing to do."

Ronald Adrine, Cleveland Municipal Court administrative and presiding judge, said the concept is "really overdue" and responds to "a problem anybody could see as it relates to veterans coming back and rotating through our system without getting the help they needed."

Nancy Miller, of Akron, a volunteer peer/mentor for the veterans docket who is studying such courts for her doctoral dissertation in criminal justice said, "I'm a veteran [Army] and I really believe in what these courts can accomplish."

The benefits include cost effectiveness and lower recidivism rates, she noted.

"So many veterans going through these courts have special needs that a nonveteran may not have," she added. "It's a chance for rehabilitation, rather than just keep going through the criminal justice system and never getting help."

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