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**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES**  
MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS  
1816 S. Figueroa Street  
Los Angeles, California 90015  
[mva.lacounty.gov](http://mva.lacounty.gov)



Jim Zenner  
Director

February 7, 2024

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: JIM ZENNER, DIRECTOR  
MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Zenner", written over the printed name.

**REPORT BACK ON EXPANDING AND IMPROVING COORDINATION OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S SERVICE DELIVERY TO JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERANS (ITEM NO. 6, AGENDA OF NOVEMBER 7, 2023)**

On November 7, 2023, your Honorable Board (Board) directed the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA), in close collaboration with various County departments to report back on the implementation plan and timeline to enhance services for justice-involved veterans by establishing data-sharing, standardized jail intake screening, expanded identification strategies, trauma-informed care training, recruiting staff with military backgrounds, creating alternative sentencing opportunities, and streamlining re-entry services.

I am pleased to share that, with the invaluable support of our philanthropic partner, May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust (a non-profit serving military-connected community members) MVA has secured the services of a consultant, Psych Armor. Psych Armor will play a pivotal role in leading and guiding this effort. Over the last several months, the consultant and MVA have begun to develop a landscape analysis of the organizations and agencies that interact with justice-involved veterans through a kick-off meeting and subsequent follow-up meetings. The landscape analysis intends to better understand how the organizations connect as well as identify any gaps in services.

The collaborative efforts between all impacted departments and MVA are focused on establishing the following key components within the proposed timeline:

- Facilitating seamless data-sharing mechanisms between involved departments to enhance coordination and information exchange;
- Developing standardized screening questions covering crucial areas such as housing and employment to gather comprehensive information during jail intake;
- Expanding identification strategies for veterans upon jail intake to improve the accuracy of veteran status identification;
- Planning and implementing trauma-informed care training for County staff engaging with justice-involved veterans to ensure appropriate and sensitive support;
- Actively recruiting and hiring County staff and contractors with lived experience and military backgrounds to better engage with the justice-involved veteran community;
- Creating and expanding alternative sentencing opportunities through collaboration with community-based providers experienced in working with veterans; and

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- Streamlining re-entry services specifically tailored for justice-involved veterans to ensure a smooth transition into civilian life.

Furthermore, as we progress with the development of a comprehensive framework, we recognize the importance of making changes in real-time and not waiting for the plan to take action on identified needs. Our ongoing efforts prioritize addressing evolving challenges promptly, ensuring the proactive alignment of initiatives with the changing landscape of justice-involved veterans' needs.

In addition to this work, we are also exploring funding opportunities through Assembly Bill (AB) 109, to establish a robust Justice-Involved Division within MVA. The AB109 funding request process is scheduled to begin in April 2024, and we plan to submit a funding proposal at that time. Additionally, MVA submitted a Productivity Investment Fund application for consideration by the County's Quality and Productivity Commission to support training of County first responders and justice departments on the unique needs of our veteran community.

MVA and our partners, including our fellow County departments, are committed to delivering a comprehensive and well-coordinated plan that addresses the unique needs of justice-involved veterans. We anticipate reporting back on the detailed implementation plan and timeline in May 2024.

We will continue to keep your Board apprised of these efforts and their progress.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at (213) 765-9678, or your staff may contact Acting Chief Deputy Zuleyda Santana at (213) 765-9225 or via email at [zsantana@mva.lacounty.gov](mailto:zsantana@mva.lacounty.gov).

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Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
Each Board Deputy  
County Counsel  
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Department of Mental Health  
Department of Health Services  
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Department of Public Defender  
Department of Public Social Services  
Department of Alternate Public Defender  
Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department  
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Jim Zenner  
Director

June 17, 2024

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: JIM ZENNER, DIRECTOR   
MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

**REPORT BACK ON EXPANDING AND IMPROVING COORDINATION OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S SERVICE DELIVERY TO JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERANS (ITEM NO. 6, AGENDA OF NOVEMBER 7, 2023)**

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On February 7, 2024, MVA provided an update on its progress with this invaluable work. Over the last several months, MVA convened with various County departments and stakeholders to develop a landscape analysis of each organization's interactions and engagement with justice-involved veterans (JIV). The landscape analysis was intended to better understand how the organizations connect as well as identify any gaps in services.

JIVs face unique challenges that differentiate them from their civilian counterparts, including higher rates of trauma, mental health issues, and substance use disorders. These issues, compounded by justice involvement, place them at an increased risk for homelessness and suicide. The 2023 VA Annual Suicide Prevention Report identifies justice involvement as one of the highest-risk categories for suicidality among veterans.

Los Angeles County is home to approximately 232,000 veterans, and the complexity of the county's numerous law enforcement agencies and vast geographic area creates significant challenges in providing consistent and effective support for JIVs. The attached report outlines several key findings and provides actionable recommendations to enhance the services and support available to JIVs.

**Key Findings**

- **Training** - Training on military and veteran culture and the unique challenges faced by JIVs is inconsistent and non-standardized across various organizations.
- **Data Collection** - Data on JIVs and the services they receive is limited and inconsistent.
- **Referrals for Services** - There is no clear referral pathway for JIVs seeking services, leading to fragmented support.

## **Recommendations**

- **Training** - Implement standardized training in military and veteran culture, trauma-informed care, and gender-informed care for all service providers and law enforcement agencies.
- **Data Collection** - Begin and maintain comprehensive data collection on JIVs to tailor services effectively.
- **Referrals for Services** - Develop a coordinated referral system to link JIVs to necessary services and programs.
- **Strengthening Relationships with Law Enforcement** - Foster stronger partnerships between veteran service providers and law enforcement through regular meetings, proactive engagement, and joint programs.
- **Program Development** - MVA should act as a centralized connector for JIVs, coordinating services across various touchpoints, including initial contact with law enforcement, incarceration, and re-entry.

This report represents a collaborative effort among various county departments, community partners, stakeholders, and the invaluable contributions of the Lived Experience Advisory Committee, all dedicated to improving the lives of justice-involved veterans.

By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, Los Angeles County can better serve our justice-involved veterans, ensuring they receive the support and services they deserve for successful reintegration into society.

Furthermore, MVA has worked closely with the Public Safety Realignment Team (PSRT) to garner their support in recommending MVA's AB109 funding request to establish its JIV Division. MVA's proposal will be presented to the PSRT for recommendation of ongoing AB109 funding in the amount of \$2.9 million annually, on June 20, 2024. The JIV Division will provide a seamless continuum of care for justice-involved veterans, regardless of their discharge status. By positioning MVA staff at key points across the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM), we will ensure comprehensive support for veterans, including access to VA healthcare and benefits through a strategic partnership with the VA.

Lastly, MVA is pleased to announce that it has identified funding to conduct military and veteran cultural competency training through close collaboration with the Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee (CCJCC). CCJCC has committed \$300,000 for FY2024-25 for these trainings. These trainings are scheduled to begin in July 2024 and the first cohorts will include all the County departments involved in this motion and will expand Countywide in the second half of FY2024-25.

MVA and our partners, including our fellow County departments, are committed to addressing the unique needs of JIVs and work together to eliminate barriers and develop meaningful solutions. We will continue to keep your Board updated on these collective efforts.

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June 17, 2024

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Should you have any questions, please contact me at (213) 765-9678, or your staff may contact Chief Deputy Director Zuleyda Santana at (213) 765-9225 or via email at [zsantana@mva.lacounty.gov](mailto:zsantana@mva.lacounty.gov).

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Attachment

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Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority  
Los Angeles County District Attorney  
Los Angeles County Sheriff  
Probation



Expanding and Improving Coordination of  
Los Angeles County's Service Delivery to  
Justice Involved Veterans.

June 2024

Dr. Randee McLain-Malone, LCSW

Manuel Gomez, MSW, MVA Intern

## Background

### **Justice Involved Veteran**

Justice involved veterans (JIV) can experience higher rates of trauma before, during, and after their military service compared to their civilian counterparts. These issues, if left unaddressed, can lead to additional mental health and substance use challenges that may be compounded by justice involvement. Justice involved veterans are at higher risk for suicide and homelessness (Holliday et al., 2021). The 2023 VA Annual Suicide Prevention Report place justice involvement as one of the highest-risk categories for suicidality. JIVs can have difficulty attaining stable housing and employment after justice involvement (Tsai, 2014).

Los Angeles County (County) is home to approx. 232,000 Veterans according to the 2021 census. Veterans can enter the justice system in multiple ways that do not always connect or communicate with each other. There are currently four Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) in the County. There are over one hundred different law enforcement agencies across the County including but not limited to Los Angeles Police Department (LASD), Los Angeles County Sheriff Department (LASD), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Police Department campus police, California Highway Patrol, federal agencies, and smaller jurisdictions within the County. In addition to the vast number of jurisdictions the County is geographically dispersed spanning over 4,000 square miles. The size and number of agencies within the County can prove challenging to ensure JIV are not overlooked and receive tailored services to address their unique unmet needs. The recommendations within this report can help ensure JIVs have an equitable and fair chance of getting the services they need.



## **JIV Focus Groups**

The Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA) and Consultant convened monthly focus groups to identify gaps in services for justice involved veteran in the County. The focus groups addressed the issues put forth in the county motion, dated November 7, 2023, and worked to develop a strategic plan to address unmet needs. The meetings ran from January 2024 through April of 2024. The focus groups included stakeholders from MVA, Department of Mental Health, VA, LASD, Public Defender, Alternate Public Defender, Chief Information Office, Chief Executive Office-Homeless Initiative, Department of Public Social Services, Justice, Care, and Opportunities, and CCJCC. Missing from the focus groups were Probation, parole, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, LAPD, and representation from the four Veterans Treatment Courts. MVA will continue proactive outreach and engagement with community partners and county departments. In addition to the focus groups MVA and the consultant met with stakeholders and community partners separately to gain further understanding of the services available to JIVs in the County. These meetings occurred via zoom.

The focus groups culminated with a full day Human-Centered Design (HCD) session aimed to address systemic issues within JIVs in the County, improve collaboration among various stakeholders, and enhance the effectiveness of JIV support mechanisms. The HCD process focused on creating solutions that consider the diverse needs of JIVs by integrating perspectives from various community sectors. The session discussed existing barriers, potential solutions, and measures for effective implementation. The session participants engaged in a critical discussion about the need for a more inclusive approach in designing services for JIVs. It

was noted that several key community entities were absent from the discussions, which could significantly impact on the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the services provided.

### **Motion Identified Challenges**

Data Sharing Between Departments	Training Recruitment	Re-Entry Non-VA Eligible Veterans
Identification of Veterans	Alternatives to Sentencing	

### **Findings**

#### **Veterans Modules (V-Mods): LACo Sherrif Department**

V-Mods are segregated housing units within the LA County jails specifically designed for veterans. In each V-Mod there are community partners and Veterans Administration staff that regularly visit the facility and provide services including linkages to benefits and resources. LA County Sheriff's Department currently has four V-Mods; MCJ; TTCG- mod 271; TTCF- mod 272; and NCCF- mod 511.

Veterans within the V-mods can participate in education-based programming including Achieve Readiness for Tomorrow Program (START), attend remote college courses, music programs and other educational based programming.

*Community Transition Unit Veterans Liaisons* - manage veterans housing opportunities for the JIV. The CTU liaisons provide staff briefings, establish relations with deputies assigned to veteran's modules, and get to know each veteran in the V-mods. Liaisons manage all veterans release planning, arrange housing and transportation in collaboration weekly with VA Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO's).

*Females* - LACo Sherrif Department has a part time coordinator at CRDF working to help identify female veterans housed at CRDF facility in Lynwood. Ten female veterans were identified with hopes to identify more going forward. Once 20+ female veterans are identified, the intent is to house them in one row within a module in CRDF, which will replicate the model at the men's facilities. Signs recently went up in CRDF to help females understand the benefits of coming forward so equitable services can be provided to what men receive in other facilities.

### **Training**

There is a lack of consistent, standardized training across the governmental and nonprofit sector focused on military culture and the justice involved veterans. Each organization or entity subscribes to their own training that may or may not address the unique challenges of the JIVs.

LACo Sherrif Department identified lack of funding for Military Cultural Awareness for First Responders training. If funding were available to support this training across the programs it would support a more positive experience for both law enforcement and the JIV.

### **Data Collection**

There currently is limited and inconsistent data collection on who the JIV is and what services they receive in the County. Individual organizations and entities collect varying amounts of information. This varies from no information to full data collection including age, gender, veteran status, service needed, and service connection.

### **Referrals for services**

There is currently no clear path for referrals for JIVs seeking services. Individual departments and organizations have specific programs for JIVs but currently do not directly link back to the

VA or MVA. Further development of this coordinated referral system is needed to ensure JIVs receive the services and programs they need.

### **Designing for Community: Groups identified for further inclusion.**

- Care Court and Family Court: Important venues where veterans often interface with the legal system but were not represented in the focus group discussions.
- Nonprofits and Consultants: Crucial for providing specialized services and insights into veteran needs that might not be fully understood by governmental agencies.
- Department of Children and Families (DCFS): Vital for addressing issues related to veterans with families, especially those facing custody or welfare concerns.
- Department of Motor Vehicle Court: Relevant in cases where veterans face legal issues related to driving record which are often overlooked in broader veteran support frameworks.
- Communication and Outreach: There is a need for a precision outreach campaign that includes toolkits and fact sheets to engage and educate about veteran-specific services between government agencies (Example, VJO and VPAN).
- Collaboration Challenges: Current processes lack incentives for collaboration among VJOs, VPAN, and other stakeholders, which hinders effective service delivery.

### **Expungement and Record Clearing**

The Public Defender was able to identify “expungement clinics” that can be set up to assist veterans in need of these services. A coordinated outreach approach between MVA, Public Defender and VJO can assist ensuring the veterans in need of these services have access to them.

## **Other Legal**

VA Disability payments disqualify many veterans from certain legal services including fee waivers, filing fees and other fees associated with family court. This can create financial hardship for the veterans and add additional undue stress.

## **Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC)**

There are currently four VTCs in the County. Unfortunately, the VTC teams were not in attendance in the focus groups. Although, MVA and the consultant researched the programs it was unclear how their program structure worked within each court. This includes the lack of understanding of eligibility criteria and exclusionary criteria for JIVs seeking VTC program services.

The Best Practice Standards for Adult Treatment Courts outlines what objective eligibility and exclusion criteria are for VTCs. The standards highlight treatment court eligibility and exclusion criteria should be defined objectively, specifically in writing, and communicated to a wide range of potential referral sources, including judges, law enforcement personnel, pretrial services, jail staff, defense attorneys, prosecutors, treatment professionals, supervision officers and peer recovery specialists (AllRise, 2023). Additionally, the Best Practice Standards identify the need for proactive recruitment which includes education on the VTC to organizations and individuals who may work with JIV. This includes the organizations and professions listed above.

## **Recommendations**

### **Training**

To best meet the needs of JIVs we must understand the unique challenges they face. This can be done through training and continuing education for all service providers, county departments, and law enforcement agencies that encounter veterans. Standardized training in military culture, trauma informed care and gender informed care are critical in serving the JIV population. The consultant identified two categories of consumers for the training: law enforcement and providers. These two identified populations may require tailored training specific to their level of engagement with the JIV. Law Enforcement may require specialized military culture training that may support crisis intervention and de-escalation of the JIV. Community partners and county departments may require more military culture and enhanced understanding of who the JIV is and how to best support them.

### **Additional Training Specific to VTCs**

*Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)* - The U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance has a grant program that provides financial and technical assistance to states, state courts, local courts, units of local government to plan, implement, and enhance the operations of VTCs, including service coordination, participant service and supervision coordination, fidelity to the VTC model, and recovery support services. This report encourages MVA and other community partners to apply for this funding to enhance the services for the County.

*AllRise/Justice for Vets* - Justice for Vets offers free training for VTC teams. These trainings are for new courts as well as VTCs that have been in operation for many years. It is recommended that the County courts hold a collaborative Operation Tune up from AllRise/Justice for Vets to

ensure they are adhering to best practices for VTC programs. This free training is designed for established VTC programs seeking to fine-tune their program to ensure that it meets the latest evidence-based best practice standards. Follow-up trainings will improve outcomes in the program by expanding your team's knowledge and skills. Each two-day training session is facilitated by seasoned experts with years of experience in veterans' treatment courts and other justice-involved veteran programs. Participating teams will review the critical foundational practices of successful programs, gain advanced knowledge leading to higher success rates, and learn about innovative treatment practices.

### **Data Collection**

It is recommended that County organizations and entities serving veterans and their families begin and continue to collect basic demographic information. This would include age, gender, veteran status, services requested and or needed. This information can inform how to best tailor services moving forward and ensure there is an accurate picture of JIVs in LA County. This data can be reported back to MVA and aggregated over time.

It is recommended that eligible organizations utilize Veterans Re-Entry Search Service (VRSS) to identify veterans and get them linked to VA. VRSS is an automated system used to identify Veterans who are incarcerated or under supervision in the courts. Information about incarcerated Veterans provided by VRSS is used by VJO and Healthcare for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) organizations as part of their outreach activities to prevent Veteran homelessness. HCRV is designed to address community reentry needs of incarcerated Veterans; it reduces the impact of medical, psychiatric, and substance abuse problems upon community readjustment to decrease the likelihood of re-incarceration for those leaving prison. VJO provides outreach and linkage to

VA services for Veterans at initial stages of the justice system, including Veterans' courts, drug courts, and mental health courts. All users interact with VRSS using a secure web browser.

Additionally, more educational signage can be utilized in court rooms to educate veterans on the MIL-100 forms. This form when filled out can help identify veterans and get them connected to VTC or appropriate resources.

CalVet currently works with CDCR to identify veterans who are about to be released from custody. Currently, CDCR is tracking 920 veterans who are incarcerated who will be released and return to LA County. The list provided to MVA from CalVet includes information that allows the department to reach out and support them as they prepare for release.

Furthermore, it is recommended that LA County Probation Department works in conjunction with MVA to identify justice involved veterans in their programs. It is recommended that probation identifies and refers veterans to MVA which can provide the additional wrap around services the veterans and their families may need. There is potential for co-locating MVA staff in probation offices. This additional collaboration can ensure that the justice involved veteran is connected to veteran specific services in a timely manner.

### **Strengthening Relationships with Law Enforcement Agencies**

There is a need to develop stronger partnerships between veteran service providers and local law enforcement agencies. This includes:

- Initiate regular coordination meetings between MVA, veteran service organizations, and local law enforcement departments.
- Proactive engagement with LAPD -Mental Evaluation Unit; SMART and Case Assessment Management Program.



- Active collaboration with probation and parole for referral process set up for veterans to MVA.
- Train law enforcement officers on veteran-specific issues and the resources available for JIVs to improve referrals and support during the initial contact points.
- Implement joint programs and workshops that facilitate understanding and cooperation in addressing the needs JIVs.
- Introduce regular updates and newsletters to departments detailing new services, changes in policy, and opportunities for veterans.
- Encourage the establishment of a liaison role within MVA and law enforcement agencies.

### **Program Development**

To best serve JIVs within the County there is a need to coordinate and integrate services within County departments, community organizations, and law enforcement agencies. Services for this vulnerable population are often fragmented and can be confusing for the veteran to navigate. The more we can intercept early on and get the veterans into needed services and treatment we can potentially divert them from further justice involvement.

MVA should serve as a centralized connector for JIVs and their families. This would entail coordinating between governmental organizations and entities to connect the veteran to MVA or to integrate MVA staff within various touch points such as initial contact with law enforcement, incarceration, and re-entry. This connection would ensure no veteran ‘slips through the cracks’ of the overly burdensome bureaucracy of social services.

The program would include but not be limited to:

- Coordinated outreach and engagement with the community providers and governmental entities that encounter JIVs.
  - Pro-Social activities to reintegrate the JIV into the community and support systems. This can include collaboration with local Veteran Service Officers and veteran serving programs like Team RWB, Mission Continues, Wounded Warrior Project, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and other federally recognized Veteran Service Organizations
- MVA staff integration at the following touch points:
  - **Initial Contact with Law Enforcement:** This intercept will educate veterans about their rights and available resources, such as Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs), to engage effectively with their attorneys and the court. There are an estimated 1500 veterans at any given time who are navigating the legal system without adequate knowledge of the special provisions available to them.
  - **Incarceration:** During incarceration, staff would work closely with the VA Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) program, will ensure that veterans maximize their VA benefits and connect to essential healthcare and social services.
  - **Re-entry:** Re-entry interventions will link justice-involved veterans to comprehensive healthcare services, addressing underlying issues and preparing veterans for successful re-entry, thereby lowering recidivism rates.
- Comprehensive case management and linkages for the JIV and their families.
- Peer Support
- Resource Navigation
- **Evaluator:**

An evaluator can systematically assess the program effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring it meets its goals. An evaluator can collect and analyze data on program outcomes, monitor performance metrics, and identify gaps in service delivery. By collaborating with MVA staff, courts, law enforcement, probation, and community service providers, the evaluator will develop strategies for continuous improvement, recommend modifications to program protocols, and promote the integration of evidence-based practices. Their efforts will be crucial in reducing recidivism, addressing mental health challenges, and promoting successful reintegration for justice-involved veterans.

## **Conclusion**

Improving the services for JIVs is crucial for their successful reintegration into society and the overall health of the community. By acknowledging the current infrastructure limitations and implementing the proposed recommendations, Los Angeles County can significantly enhance its support systems. This targeted support is essential not only for reducing recidivism among veterans but also for improving public safety and community well-being. With these adjustments, Los Angeles County will be better equipped to serve all members of its community, ensuring that justice-involved veterans receive the comprehensive care and support they deserve.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the organizations that dedicated their time and resources to address the unmet needs of the justice involved veteran population. Special thanks to Director Jim Zenner and his team at MVA in making this work possible. Last but not least thanks to our Lived Experience

Advisory Committee for being vulnerable and sharing their experiences to better inform our services moving forward.