



# COUNTY OF ERIE

**CHRIS COLLINS**

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY

**PATRICK W. WELCH, PhD**  
DIRECTOR

(716) 858-6363

**Statement of  
Patrick W. Welch, PhD  
Director  
Veterans Service Agency  
Erie County, New York**

**Before the  
House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans Affairs**

**On the value of establishing  
Veterans Courts**

**September 16, 2009**

**Good Morning Chairman Filner, Ranking Member Buyer and distinguished members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record about the value of establishing Veterans Courts that provide a win - win situation for; the veteran; the community and the judicial system.**

**My name is Dr. Patrick Welch; I am a combat wounded disabled Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War. I currently serve as Director of the Veterans Service Agency in Erie County, New York where my office serves approximately 100,000 veterans.**

**In addition I am a member of the Vietnam Veterans of America and serve as a member of the National Board of Directors and as Chairman of the Government Affairs Committee.**

**I am here today in my official capacity of the above positions, but most importantly I am here today as volunteer mentor in the Buffalo Veterans Court.**

**When my good friend and fellow Vietnam Veteran Jack O'Connor, who is also here today, came to me and explained his concept of a Veterans Court, I was on board before he even finished his sales pitch. Then when he told me he already had a judge, Judge Robert Russell, who is also here today, that would take on these duties and that the Veterans Administration would be in court with a secure computer to access veteran's records, I immediately knew this was a winning program.**

**Then he told me that one of the key elements was to have veteran mentors in the court working with the troubled veterans, there was no doubt that the Buffalo Veterans Court was destined for greatness and that has come true.**

**The following comments are offered from my perspective as a Veteran Mentor and why we have been so successful in providing assistance to our fellow veterans.**

- 1) When we serve in the military we serve with people from all races, religions, cultures, educational and family backgrounds, yet we all work together as one to field the best Armed Forces in the world. For most who have served that feeling of brotherhood does not ever leave you and this is one element of why a veterans court is more successful than other treatment courts.**
- 2) The volunteer veteran mentors are dedicated to assisting those who have been less fortunate in the transition from the military to the civilian world.**

- 3) Most of the veterans who find themselves in the judicial system are not bad people; they just got caught up with the wrong people, places and things. This is what Judge Russell stresses constantly to them; people, places and things are what can lead to trouble that you did not really intend to happen.**
- 4) Many of these veterans in the court did not have a good support system before the military and lack that support system when they returned. Yet while in the military many thrived because of a strong and structured support system, so it is an obvious conclusion that they can for the most part become productive citizens if provided with some type of support structure and the veterans court, with a Judge, the VA and the Veteran mentors, provides just that.**
- 5) A trust develops with every veteran as we mentors meet with each of the veterans after the judge has discussed the status of their case and the next steps. In these one on one meetings we offer words of encouragement along with some straight talk advice with words that are not allowed to be used in the courtroom. These words of wisdom are more in line with how we spoke in the military, very frank and to the point. We try to explain that if they don't work to get their act in order, they will find themselves in jail. We can speak that way because the discussion is veteran to veteran and that is a very powerful element in the relationships that are developed.**
- 6) One of the dynamics that I do not believe any of us considered was that a military like command structure would develop. When you are in the military, if you have a good CO – Commanding Officer and good NCO's – Non-Commissioned Officers, you will follow them anywhere. What we have seen develop is that the Judge Russell is the Commanding Officer; we veteran mentors are the NCO's and those in the court system are the troops and they do not want to let us down or disappoint us.**

**In closing, this program works and is a better way of working with those who have served our nation than incarceration. We need to establish Veterans Courts throughout this country for everyone's long term benefit.**

**Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before this committee.**

**Patrick W. Welch, PhD**