

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE MIKE COFFMAN (CO-06)
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

September 26, 2017

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by thanking you for including my bill in today's legislative hearing. To our witnesses, thank you for your testimony, and for ensuring Congress and the American public better understand the challenges facing our veterans today.

While many veterans successfully readjust and transition back to civilian life after their military service, unfortunately, some do not. Often due to undiagnosed or untreated issues related to their service, veterans find themselves involved in the criminal justice system.

My bill, H.R. 2147 – the Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act, builds upon an existing and successful program that works with criminal justice involved veterans and connects them with the services they need.

Mr. Chairman, Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) were created to be dedicated to veteran offenders specifically. These specialty, diversionary courts take veterans out from the regular criminal justice process to address the underlying issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or substance abuse.

The VA provides Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Specialists who are licensed social workers operating through VA Medical Centers as part of the VJO Program. These VJO Specialists link veterans to available VA services and treatment, and monitor the veteran's progress in the Veteran Treatment Courts.

This successful model avoids the unnecessary incarceration of veterans with mental illness, assesses their health and social needs, and then helps develop a rehabilitation treatment program specific to the veteran's needs.

In my district, the 18th Judicial Veterans Treatment Court has a 74% success rate for those who have participated in their program. Clearly, this program works.

Mr. Chairman, there are more than 260 VJO Specialists in 167 VA Medical Centers nationwide. However, the VA currently lacks a sufficient number of VJO Specialists to meet the demand for their services. This means numerous veterans cannot avail themselves of the opportunity to enter the Veteran Treatment Courts and succeed in rehabilitating themselves.

My bill, H.R. 2147, will help the VA to better meet the demands of the program and to serve many more veterans by authorizing the VA Secretary to hire 50 additional VJO Specialists. H.R. 2147 also requires the VA Secretary to identify an offset, and requires the VA and GAO to report to Congress on the implementation of this bill.

Mr. Chairman, our veterans have served us – now let us serve those veterans who need our help. As a Marine Combat Veteran, I like to live by the rule that we never leave anyone behind, and the Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act makes sure that we do not forget those who bravely served our country in their time of need.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of my legislation and I yield back the remainder of my time.