

# DAVIDSON COUNTY VETERANS COURT

JUDGE MELISSA BLACKBURN



## Participant Handbook

*“Helping Veterans Find the Road Home!”*



## Welcome to the Davidson County Veterans Court.

You have agreed to participate in this program to deal with issues that have resulted in your arrest.

As Judge in this court and your partner in working through your problems, I want you to know this court is here to help. The program is tough. We don't offer you opportunities to make excuses. What we do is work to allow you the opportunity to reclaim control of your life.

I am pleased that you have chosen to be a part of this program. By doing so, you have taken the first step - recognizing that you need help. You will find help here if you participate in good faith and work with the staff. Always be honest with us and tell us when you need help. Everyone in this program is committed to your success, but we can't help you if you don't participate in good faith.

I look forward to working with you. Together, we can put you on the road home.

- Judge Melissa Blackburn









As a participant in the Davidson County Veterans Court, you are expected to follow the instructions given to you in Court by Judge Blackburn and the Court treatment team. You will also be responsible for complying with the treatment plan that will be developed. This handbook will explain what is expected of you and provide general program information.

**We encourage you to share this handbook with your family, friends, and significant others so they will know about the work you are doing with the court. Support from those around you will be extremely important throughout your participation in the program.**

The Davidson County Veterans Court is a judicially supervised treatment program for persons whose substance abuse, dependency and or serious mental health issues appear to have contributed significantly to their current arrest and or conviction of a crime. This program requires a total commitment to remaining clean and sober as well as dealing with any mental health issues and leading a law-abiding life. Unless sentenced to Davidson County Veterans Court, the consent of the prosecutor, defense counsel, and defendant, the referring Judge and or the Davidson County Veterans Court Judge is required. However, you may be required to participate as a result of being sentenced.

Participating in the Davidson County Veterans Court requires regular court appearances before the Hon. Melissa Blackburn, the Presiding Veterans Court Judge. The Davidson County Veterans Court is located in courtroom 3B of the A.A. Birch Courthouse at 408 2nd Avenue North. You will be required to follow and complete a treatment plan. Treatment begins immediately upon your first appearance in court. You will be referred to the Veterans Administration as well as other appropriate programs for an initial screening and evaluation.

### **This plan may require all or some of the following...**

- Outpatient treatment
- Inpatient treatment/Residential treatment
- Halfway House or Transitional housing placement
- Regular and random Davidson County Veterans drug testing
- Counseling (individual and group)
- Mental Health Counseling
- Educational/vocational/employment program
- Participation in self-help (AA/NA) groups

### **The Veterans Court case management staff will also help you with other areas of your life according to your individual needs. This may include referrals for...**

- Skills testing and a educational assessment
- Job training and job-readiness training
- School or other educational services
- Job placement services
- Family counseling
- Life Skills classes
- Public Assistance/Medicaid
- Recreational activities





You are required to appear in Davidson County Veterans Court weekly or every other week and depending on your progress, your appearances in court may be reduced to once a month. The Judge will be given progress reports on you regarding your Davidson County Veterans drug tests, attendance, and participation in your treatment program. These reports will come from the members of the Veterans Court support team with whom you are working (such as Veterans Administration, Operation Stand Down Tennessee, etc.). The Judge will ask you about your progress, and discuss any problems you may be having.

You will be expected to **remain arrest free, remain clean and sober, and attend all your scheduled court appearances and all your scheduled treatment appointments.** Attending all of your scheduled treatment sessions, including individual/ group counseling, substance abuse and mental health sessions and all other sessions as directed is **mandatory.** You will be required to be on time for all sessions. If you are late, you may not be allowed to attend and may be considered absent. **Your treatment schedule will vary according to your progress. It is your responsibility to schedule all needed appointments and to arrive on time for all of them.** The Veterans Court treatment team, your treatment providers, and YOU will develop plans to fit your specific needs. One will specifically address your substance abuse problem and or mental health issues, and others will address other life issues such as education, vocational training, parenting and family skills. These plans will be strength based and will serve as a guide or roadmap during your participation in the program. Expect to contribute to them with your thoughts and needs.

One of the primary goals of Veterans Court program is to help you remain abstinent from alcohol and all non-prescribed drugs. You will be drug tested throughout the entire program. The Judge will have access to all test results including failures, refusals to test and adulterated tests. A drug test may be ordered at any time. A positive test or admission of alcohol or other drug use will not disqualify you but may result in a sanction or change in treatment plan. Drug screens may be conducted at your treatment facility, during court appearances, or at any other time.

## What's In It for Me?

### *Benefits of the Program Include...*

#### **Dismissal or reduction of your charges**

In most cases, successful completion of the program results in having the original charge(s) dismissed or reduced. In other cases, depending upon a number of factors affecting your entry into the program a no jail or no probation sentence will be imposed. (Your attorney will be able to discuss particulars of your specific case.)

#### **A Second Chance**

This program offers you the chance to move forward in your life with the knowledge, skills and insight you have learned.

#### **A Healthy Lifestyle**

The program will help you take control of your life in many ways. Even more important than learning the skills about how not to abuse drugs and alcohol and committing any more crimes-are the things you will learn how to do: eating right, reducing stress, becoming fully employed, rebuilding family relationships, and becoming a productive member of the community.



# WE ARE HERE TO HELP!



Everyone on the Davidson County Veterans Court Treatment Team wants you to succeed. If you take advantage of the assistance offered by the Treatment Team, you will discover many new ways to make a better life for yourself.

While we recognize that addiction is a treatable disease, it is important for you to remember that you are in the program because of a criminal charge.

## Program Expectations...

At some point following your arrest, you were provided several choices: (1) participation in the Davidson County Veterans Court Program or (2) remaining in criminal court for prosecution or sentencing on your pending charges. If you are accepted into the program, successful completion and graduation may result in reducing or dismissal of the pending charges or the imposition of a more favorable sentence, depending on the terms of your individual contract.

**To be successful you will need to follow these rules:**

- Arrive at Court and at all of your scheduled appointments on time.
- **Do not** miss any scheduled Court dates, treatment sessions, support group meetings, or conferences. If you miss due to medical issues, you must provide medical verification to the Court as well as treatment counselor.





## Program Expectations Continued...

- **You must** contact the Client Specialist if you are having any kind of difficulty, including making your appointments on time. You cannot change your treatment plan on your own. Do not wait until your next Court appearance as it can lead to sanctions by the Judge.
- Meet with your Attorney when scheduled and **ask questions**, especially if you are confused or uncertain about the Court process. Do not be afraid to ask for assistance. The court and your attorney are here to help.
- You are not allowed to take any narcotic medications without permission- prescribed by a doctor or from a family member/friend. If you have a question to whether or not your current medications are narcotic, speak with your doctor, pharmacist or ask a Client Specialist for assistance.
- **Do not** use any alcohol based fluids, example: cough syrup, Listerine, etc. There are items sold over the counter that contain no alcohol.
- Non-Alcoholic beer contains alcohol!!!! **NO ALCOHOL means NO ALCOHOL!!!**
- Expect to take random Avertest urine tests and breathalyzers at Court sessions. Do not tamper with urine samples as they are fully observed. Tampering with your sample will lead to a jail sanction.
- You are **not** to leave the jurisdiction of the Court unless you receive the Judge's approval. If an event or emergency arises, you must contact a Client Specialist or report to Court to speak with the Judge.
- If your personal information changes (location, phone number, etc.), immediately contact a Client Specialist with a full update.
- If you need a letter written on your behalf, you must contact the Court no later than the day before you need it.
- Upon entry into the program, you can sign releases for those you want information shared with (friends, family, etc.). At any time, you may add or delete any releases. No information will be shared without a release.
- Dress appropriately for Court and treatment sessions. If you are unsure as to what is appropriate dress, ask a Client Specialist.
- **Do not** argue with the Judge or staff. If you disagree with something, state your position in a calm manner and accept what is being asked of you.
- Do not coerce (or force) any other program participant into doing anything that may harm or interfere with their recovery.
- **Do not** make threats toward other participants or staff or behave in a violent manner.
- **Do not** bring drugs, alcohol, or weapons into any treatment program, meeting, appointment, or event. Only bring prescription medications when required by the court.



Always keep in mind that removal from the program may result in a return to criminal court or sentencing on the charge(s) to which you have been convicted.

## How Long Will I Be in the Program?

*The amount of time you spend in the program will be determined by your individual progress, but it will be no less than 12 months.*

There are some steps you can take to help you begin this program.

- Get to know the names of all of the staff associated with the Davidson County Veterans Court, and keep their phone numbers handy.
- Develop a folder or notebook to keep this handbook and other forms and papers that will be given to you.
- Know how you will travel to Court and have a back-up plan if you are relying on another person to bring you here.
- Begin to organize things at home. Being organized where you reside helps you to be organized in the way you approach other areas of your life.
- If you need help with reading or understanding any of the forms, papers, or proceedings, make sure you let us know so we can help you.
- Obtain a calendar and keep it up-to-date with your court dates, meeting dates, etc. and bring it with you to Court.







# Phase One

## ASSESSMENT, ORIENTATION and STABILIZATION

**The standards for Phase One compliance are, but not limited to the following:**

- Weekly appearance in Veterans Treatment Court
- A minimum of one weekly contact, via telephone, e mail or text with their Client Specialist
- Continued follow through with programmatic treatment goals
- Attending all scheduled appointments
- Medication stabilization and management
- Engagement in both mental health and/or substance abuse treatment as ordered by the court
- Comply with all requested urine screens (minimum of 2 screens per week)
- Finally, due to the critical role community partnership plays in recovery, it is expected that each veteran engaged in the court to consistently be engaging in community service activities through agencies partnered with the court to ensure that each veteran is “giving back” to the community in which they reside.

**Veterans will be permitted to move to Phase Two when they have consistently demonstrated the following:**

- Attend all appointments with the Court, Client Specialist and Community Service Agencies, etc.;
- Cooperate, as needed, with the volunteer mentor
- Demonstrate commitment to and follow through with all goals and initial treatment plans
- Stability in housing
- Stability in fiscal management
- Abstinence from ALL drugs and alcohol for, at least, 14 days without relapse

**Since each plan is client specific, each case will be considered individually by the Court Team to make the recommendation for advancement.**



## Phase Two

### TREATMENT AND EDUCATION

The standards for Phase Two compliance are, but not limited to the following:

- Attend Veterans Treatment Court on a bi-weekly basis
- Meet and/or have contact with their Client Specialist as directed
- Attend all appointments with all designated treatment providers and community service agencies
- Continue to actively carry out their Veterans Treatment Court recovery plan, as developed by the court
- Demonstrate ongoing stability with regards to housing and fiscal management
- Demonstrate continued abstinence from all alcohol and drugs
- Demonstrate their adherence to their signed probationary contract with the Veterans Treatment Court

Advancement to Phase Three will occur when the participating veteran has consistently demonstrated clear signs of stability in the following areas:

- Attending all appointments with the Court, Client Specialist and Community Service Agencies, etc
- Continued cooperation with volunteer veteran mentor
- Following through with Veterans Treatment Court probationary treatment plan
- Medication stabilization and management
- Stability in housing
- Stability in fiscal management
- Continued abstinence from all alcohol and drugs, with at least 90 days' sobriety

Since each plan is client specific, each case will be considered individually by the Court Team to make the recommendation for advancement.

PARTICIPANTS WILL SPEND A MINIMUM OF 120 DAYS IN PHASE TWO





## Phase Three

### EDUCATION, TRANSITION AND GRADUATION

Phase Three is the final evaluation and graduation phase of the Veterans Treatment Court program. It is intended to evaluate the ability of the participant to remain offense free without future supervision and shall require the following of the participants; therefore, the standards for Phase Two compliance are, but not limited to the following:

- Attend Veterans Treatment Court a minimum of once per month
- Have contact with their Client Specialist on a regular basis, as instructed by the court
- Attend all appointments with the appropriate treatment providers
- Follow through with the Veterans Treatment Court signed probationary contract and recovery plan
- Demonstrate continued stability with regard to housing and fiscal management
- Continued abstinence from all alcohol and drugs
- Fulfillment of all probationary matters (restitution, community service hours, etc...)

**PARTICIPANTS MUST REMAIN IN PHASE THREE FOR A MINIMUM OF 120 DAYS TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR PROGRAMMATIC GRADUATION.**

## Graduation

Participants will qualify for graduation from the Program by completing, but not limited to, the following:

- No positive urine sample results for at least 90 consecutive days before graduation
- Complete a written speech discussing lessons learned, court experience and future plans to be verbally delivered to the court prior to graduation, and
- Fulfill treatment plan goals based on input from treatment providers



You are required to arrive on time and stay until court is finished unless the judge dismisses you earlier.

### **Regular Attendance**

As a participant you are required to attend all of your scheduled treatment sessions, all of your other appointments, and all of your scheduled court dates.

**Treatment sessions** include counseling, substance abuse sessions, education sessions and all other sessions as directed. You will be required to be on time for all sessions. If you are late, you may not be allowed to attend and may be considered absent.

Your treatment schedule will vary according to your progress. It is your responsibility to schedule all needed appointments and to arrive on time for all of them.

### **Drug and Alcohol Screening**

One of the primary goals is to keep you off alcohol and all non-prescribed drugs. You will be tested throughout the entire program. The Judge will have access to all test results including failures, refusals to test and adulterated tests. A test may be ordered at any time. A positive test or admission of alcohol or other use will not disqualify you but may result in a sanction or change in treatment planning. Screens may be conducted at your treatment facility, during court appearances, during your home visits, or at any other time.

**You will be required to voluntarily report all drug or alcohol use to the Judge at each court appearance.**

- Repeated substance use will result in a sanction that may include jail, a higher level of supervision and/ or both.
- Failure to report drug or alcohol use will result in jail time.
- Any drugs that a doctor prescribes for you must be reported to your drug court case manager. You may want to consider informing your doctor that you are in recovery and are not able to take narcotics.





### Release of Information:

All members of the Team must be able to communicate with your treatment providers about your eligibility and progress in the program. Upon entry, you will be required to sign "releases" of information to allow this to happen. You must also sign additional releases as needed to arrange further treatment, counseling or support services referrals.

### Confidentiality:

State and federal laws require strict confidentiality regarding issues related to substance abuse and treatment. In response to these regulations, the Davidson County Veterans Court has developed policies and procedures that guard your privacy. You will be asked to sign consent forms for the various agencies and staff working on your team to communicate with one another. We will not agree to keep any information secret from the Judge or other Court team members. You are not to share Court reports or documents with family and friends (other than this handbook), and you are not to share the names of any other Treatment Court participants, nor any information they disclose. This is true also of others you meet in treatment or in self-help/ support groups.

### Contract:

Participants will be **required** to sign a contract in court. Your contract may require more than is listed in this booklet. Before you sign your contract you will have an opportunity to review your contract with your defense attorney and have your questions answered.

Private and Confidential



# SHOW UP, BE HONEST!

## What Are the Rules of the Program?

*To remain in the Davidson County Veterans Court Program you are required to follow the rules of the court.*

- You **must** participate in regular court supervision (In other words, you must show up at Davidson County Veterans Court and or meetings with your Davidson County Veterans Court Client Specialist on time).
- You **must** live a law abiding life and avoid activities and people that can get you into trouble (In other words, you must not get rearrested).
- You **must** attend all scheduled treatment and support services appointments.
- You **must** successfully complete all four phases of the program.
- You **must** remain clean and sober.
- You **must** complete all required paperwork.

# Policy





## What if I Don't Follow the Rules?

***If you break the rules of the Davidson County Veterans Court you may be subjected to a sanction. Doing any of the following may result in a sanction, including jail time.***

- New arrest or other illegal activity.
- Leaving a treatment program against medical advice.
- Violating your contract with the court.
- Positive drug screens or admission of use.
- Failure to take a test to screen for drug or alcohol use.
- Attempts to falsify drug tests
- Missing or arriving late for group or individual treatment appointments or any other treatment appointments
- Missing or arriving late for Davidson County Veterans Court appearances
- Failure to follow the direction of the Davidson County Veterans Court Judge, Davidson County Veterans Court Client Specialists, or VA Representative or any other member of the treatment team
- Demonstrating a lack of program progress

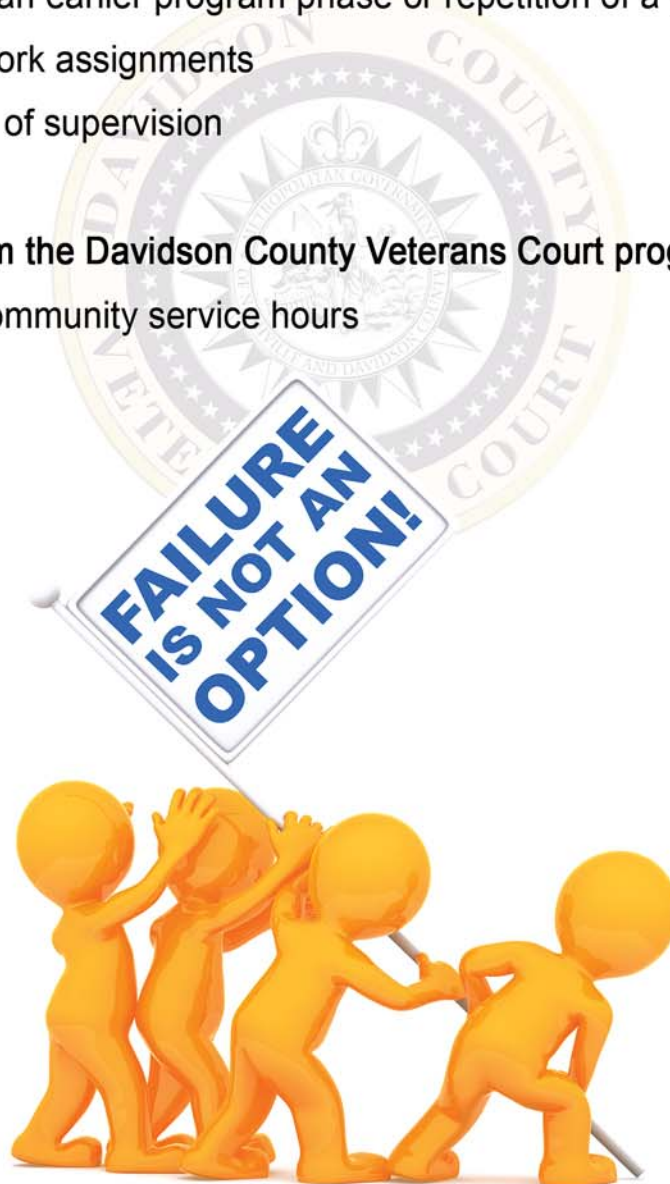




***A failure to appear in court when scheduled will result in a sanction that may include a period of incarceration.***

**SANCTIONS MAY INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING...**

- Verbal warning
- Increased urine testing
- Increased attendance at sessions
- Placement in an earlier program phase or repetition of a phase
- Community work assignments
- A higher level of supervision
- Incarceration
- Dismissal from the Davidson County Veterans Court program altogether.
- Increase of community service hours







*Incentives For Progress May Include...*

- Recognition by the Judge
- Reduction of community service hours
- Recreational activities
- Decrease in urine testing
- Decrease in attendance at Court
- Certificates of Completion
- Graduation
- Dismissal or reduction of charges



Remember, the program will work if you stick with it, stay engaged and ask questions.  
**IF YOU ARE NOT SURE OR DON'T KNOW... ASK!**



### Recovery And Treatment Planning...

The Court team and your treatment providers will work with you to develop plans to fit your specific needs. One will specifically address your substance abuse problem, and others will address other life issues such as education, vocational training, parenting and family skills.

These plans will be strength based and will serve as a guide or roadmap during your participation in the program. **Expect to contribute to them with your thoughts and needs.**





It is essential that you develop the support as well as the skills that will allow you to build a lasting recovery that will help you for the rest of your life. The team recognizes that recovery is not an easy process, but we recognize your effort and courage to change. Together, we can make it work.

Remember: while there are certain things you must complete, Your ability to move along in the program and graduate will depend mostly on your own actions. If you miss appointments, ignore other requirements, or fail to stay away from drug and alcohol use, your time in the Davidson County Veterans Court could be extended or you could be removed from the program.

The final decision about your readiness to graduate will be made by the Team. Your Davidson County Veterans Court Client Specialist will let you know when the Team and Judge have decided that you are eligible for graduation. You must then complete your Graduation Interview Form, submit it as directed, and attend a graduation review panel.

One benefit to participation will be a mentor assigned to you to assist you in your journey through the Veterans Court Program. A mentor who understands the difficulties you have experienced in returning to civilian life is a valuable resource. Get to know your mentor and develop a trusting relationship. They will help you on the road home.





# Graduation | Recognition

Graduation is a time to celebrate your transition to a healthy lifestyle. You will be able to invite your family and friends to join you at your graduation Ceremony. This special event is recognition of your accomplishments and marks the beginning of your new way of life.

At your graduation you will be encouraged to maintain ties with the staff and other successful participants in our Alumni program. This will give you a chance to help new participant maintain positive relationships with people who can help you with your relapse prevention plan and socialize in a sober environment with your program friends.

# CONGRATULATIONS!!!















Department of  
**Mental Health &  
Substance Abuse Services**

"This project is funded under an agreement with the State of Tennessee, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and is supported by Award # 2014-DC-BX-0057 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, USDOJ."