



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Contact: Amie M. Downs
412-350-3711 (office)
412-327-3700 (cell)
amie.downs@alleghenycounty.us

Veterans Affairs Receives \$20,000 Grant from the Veterans' Trust Fund *Funding to Support Veteran Re-Entry Coordinator Position*

PITTSBURGH – The Office of Veterans Affairs has received a \$20,000 grant from the Veterans' Trust Fund (VTF) administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA). The grant, endorsed and supported by State Senator Pam Iovino, will allow the office to utilize a veteran re-entry coordinator to assist former service men and women who are involved with the criminal justice system.

"The addition of a veteran re-entry coordinator to the county's Office of Veterans Affairs will be a game changer for the veteran involved in the criminal justice system and could be a model for the rest of the state," said Iovino. "Accessing earned benefits and support programs are critical to success upon release and a means to avoid recidivism. Reducing recidivism is good for the veteran, is good for our communities, and is good for the taxpayer."

Allegheny County has approximately 80,000 veterans in the county. Of those, 6-8% end up involved in the criminal justice system. In addition to the Veterans Court which has been established, the county has also established a Veterans Pod in the jail to offer services to veterans including wellness and financial classes, career and job training, and more. Obstacles remain for veterans reentering society, including gaining access to the benefits earned as a result of their military service. The funding provided will allow for the development and implementation of program to assist veterans in accessing resources and services.

"Senator Iovino's service to this country, then the county, and now the state has always remain focused on those men and women of the military who serve us so admirably. Her support of this grant is just one more way that she continues to show that commitment," said Fitzgerald. "Allegheny County has led the way in providing support to our veterans who are in the criminal justice system – first through Veterans Court and then the Veterans Pod, and this newest addition will allow us to continue to serve those who have served us."

Veterans who are incarcerated may have more difficulty reaching and working with a Veteran Service Officer who can assist them in obtaining benefits. The creation of this position allows for a single point of contact who coordinates services; social support through veterans' organizations, peer mentors, and awareness programming; support through advising and assistance with Veterans Administration benefits and services; career and educational services; military discharge upgrades where appropriate in Veterans Court and in the Veterans Pod; and a coordinated referral program to link veterans with resources in the community to help with housing, financial and mental health needs.

"We are extremely grateful to the support of Senator Iovino, the Veterans' Trust Fund, and the DMVA for this grant. This funding allows us to do more directly with this population so that they may set off on a better and different path," said Dwight Boddorf, Chief Veterans Affairs Officer for the county. "We look forward to the successes that this partnership will provide."

Over the next 18 months, the funding will allow the Office of Veterans Affairs to increase the enrollment of veterans into the Veterans Pod, increase access to benefits and services, and assist veterans in successfully transitioning to work and community life by connecting those individuals with community and employment resources prior to release.

More information on the Office of Veterans Affairs is available at <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/veterans/index.aspx>.

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Office of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald

101 Courthouse | 436 Grant Street | Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Phone: 412-350-6500 | Fax: 412-350-6512

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