

**Virginia Board of Veterans Services  
Point of Contact Report  
Justice Involved Veterans Program and Veterans Treatment Dockets Update**

1. Date of Report: September 2023
2. BVS POC: Chairman Mike Dick, Senator Bryce Reeves
3. Service Area/Program: Justice Involved Veterans/Justice Involved Services and Veterans Treatment Dockets
4. VDVS Director/Program Manager: Housing and Criminal Justice Director- Donna Harrison; Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator-Desiree Taylor
5. Mission of service area/program:

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support Program (VVFS) is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and provides OUTREACH, CONNECTION and SUPPORT to Service Members, Veterans, caregivers, and family members as they address the challenges of military service, transition, deployments, Post Traumatic Stress, and other behavioral health concerns, as well as Traumatic Brain Injuries and other physical injuries. VVFS also provides housing/homeless, and justice services care coordination.

**SERVICES THEY PROVIDE:** VVFS provides peer and family support, care coordination, and resource linkages to Service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). Referrals are coordinated with Community Services Boards, community nonprofits, brain injury service providers, VA medical facilities and other public and private agencies. **VVFS Justice Involved Services (JIS) program is housed within VVFS and provides outreach and support to justice-involved service members and veterans interfacing with courts, diversion/veteran treatment docket programs, during incarceration in jails and prisons, and while on probation and/or parole supervision.**

6. Who does the service area/program serve?

Veterans of any era (regardless of discharge status) who are Virginia residents; members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves; and family members and caregivers of those veterans and service members. They work hard to provide a "no wrong door approach", meaning if they can't provide that service within the program, they'll do their best to connect them to a resource/provider that can.

**VVFS Justice Involved Services (JIS) program provides services for veterans in specialty dockets (veteran treatment dockets, drug courts, and behavioral health**

**dockets), incarcerated in jails and prisons, and veterans on probation and/or parole supervision.**

7. What are the service line's primary objectives?

VVFS provides care coordination, peer and family support services to Service Members, Veterans, and their families (SMVF).

VVFS facilitates access to behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services at the Federal, State, and local levels for SMVF.

**The VVFS JIS mission is to provide services and resource connections for justice-involved veterans across the continuum of the criminal justice system from diversion, to incarceration, and on community supervision.**

8. What are the key results that support the objectives?

In FY23 (thru May 2023), VVFS served an average of 322 total clients (new and existing clients) each week. Of these clients, 1,123 were new clients. This included connecting veterans and their family members for resources to approximately 2,523 service needs. These include housing needs (41%), behavioral health support (11%), benefits assistance (10%), employment (7%), and homeless assistance (9%).

**VVFS Justice Involved Services (JIS) program data:** In FY23 (thru June 2023), VVFS served 82 justice-involved veteran clients. The staff serve an average of 35 clients each week.

JIS Program Demographics:

Gender-Males (95%) Females (5%)

Race- White (54%) Black/African American (39%) Asian (1%) Other (1%)

Prefer not to answer (2%) Unknown (3%)

**Homeless/housing assistance needs: 71%**

**National Justice Involved Veteran Data:**

State Prisons: 7.9%

Federal prisons: 5.3%

Total: 107,400 veterans in state and federal prisons

**Justice Involved Veterans in Virginia Data:**

VADOC data as of September 2023

Institutions- 1,519 (6.18% of incarcerated VADOC population)

Community supervision- 2,014 (3.24% of state supervision population)

Jail (state responsible)- 23

Lack of veteran data from other criminal justice system intercept points (jails, courts, law enforcement/arrests, etc.)

9. What specific objective has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objectives?

**FY23 Data Overview:**

- 85% of justice-involved veterans with an identified behavioral health need will be connected to an appropriate resource
- **85% of veterans experiencing literal homelessness will be connected to a shelter/housing resource**

10. What are some operational highlights from the past year?

**Veteran Treatment Dockets:** The VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists (VJS) are members of the seven Veteran Treatment Dockets in Virginia. Loudon County started a veteran treatment docket last year. Hampton Veteran Treatment Docket closed in January 2023 due to issues related to eligibility criteria. There are two new pending veteran treatment dockets in Virginia- Chesterfield and Pulaski. There is future interest in Veteran Treatment dockets from Henrico, Va. Beach, and Newport News.

The VVFS VJS continue to participate in the planning for veterans treatment dockets. The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director provides technical assistance to jurisdictions interested in starting veterans treatment dockets along with the Virginia Supreme Court Office of the Executive Secretary.

In FY22, Virginia started the new Virginia Veteran Treatment Docket Implementation Curriculum training. This training is required for all new veteran treatment dockets in Virginia. The Chesterfield County veteran treatment docket team was the first team to complete this training. Loudoun and Pulaski completed the training in FY23.

**VA VJO/HCRV Specialists collaborative meetings:** In FY23, the VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists (VJS) participated in the quarterly collaborative meetings with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Specialists and Healthcare for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) team. The group discusses program updates, issues related to the justice-involved veteran population, and training opportunities.

**VRSS trainings with local jails:** In collaboration with the Supreme Court of Virginia Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) and the VA, the VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists and VVFS Criminal Justice Director conducted statewide training to local and regional jails on the VA's *Veterans Reentry Search Services* (VRSS) system in order to increase veteran identification in the local jails.

**VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator:** A VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator position was added to the VVFS team in FY23. Desiree Taylor started with VVFS in September 2022.

**Corporation for Supportive Housing Housing and Justice workgroup:**

The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director and VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator joined the Justice and Housing workgroup which is a group based on a grant received by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). The Justice and Housing workgroup is a national project with a geographic focus area to explore the need and address challenges for justice-involved individuals to secure housing. In FY23, the group created a Learning Collaborative for property managers and landlords to examine tenant selection plans and help increase housing access for justice-involved individuals.

11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?

Incarcerated veterans outreach-The VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists, Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator and Housing and Criminal Justice Director continue to provide veteran information sessions for VADOC correctional facilities and local jails. For incarcerated veterans in state prisons (VADOC), the VVFS VJS staff have been conducting intake appointments via phone for needs assessments and re-entry planning. VADOC facility counselors are still available for service coordination and re-entry planning. Phone appointments are coordinated through the VADOC facility counselors.

Intake phone appointments have been more difficult for veterans incarcerated in local and regional jails due to the lack of staff available in the local jails. Most local jails do not have counselors or discharge planning staff to assist with re-entry efforts.

In FY23, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator conducted housing information sessions for incarcerated veterans and staff at VADOC correctional facilities.

Resource fairs- Resource fairs are slowly picking up in the VADOC facilities and Probation and Parole District offices. The VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists participate in these fairs. They provide **in-reach** to incarcerated veterans and outreach to veterans on community supervision and family members at the resource fairs sponsored by Probation and Parole Districts.

12. What, if any, new initiatives/innovative solutions were launched during the past year?

Additional VJS position: An additional VJS position was added in the North region to provide additional docket coverage and outreach to local jails.

VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator: The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator (HCJC) provides housing technical assistance and resources to housing and criminal justice partners. The VVFS HCJC also provides housing case consultation and resources to the VVFS program staff.

VADOC Probation and Parole Districts- The JIS program is partnering with VADOC to provide support to their probation and parole officers as they work with veterans on community supervision. The program met with VADOC to provide information so they could create a community supervision dashboard that captures veteran status and key metrics on health and insurance needs for veterans. The JIS program will be working with VADOC on providing services and resource connections for veterans with certain metrics related to housing/homelessness, behavioral health needs, and insurance benefits.

Incarcerated veterans outreach- The VJS, Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator, and Housing and Criminal Justice Director provide information sessions to incarcerated veterans and staff in jails and prisons. The Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator added a housing-focused session to the information sessions to educate staff and veterans on housing resources.

In some cases, due to intermittent COVID-19 precautions, VADOC continues to suspend all in-person visits for individuals in certain state prisons. For incarcerated veterans in state prisons (VADOC), the VVFS VJS staff continue to conduct intake appointments via phone for needs assessments and re-entry planning. VADOC facility counselors are still available for service coordination and re-entry planning. Phone appointments are coordinated through the VADOC facility counselors.

JIS program information was provided to the Virginia Sheriffs' Association's list serv. The VVFS VJS also maintained virtual contact with jail staff contacts about the JIS program and referral process.

C&P exams for incarcerated veterans- In-person Compensation & Pension (C&P) exams for incarcerated veterans have resumed in VADOC facilities. In addition, virtual C&P exams were conducted for individuals with behavioral health claims. Virtual C&P exams for behavioral health claims continue to be an option. The Housing and CJ Director continues to track on all C&P exams for incarcerated veterans in VADOC.

13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area/program at present?

- ❖ **Justice service needs** – Veteran treatment dockets are expanding in Virginia (7 current dockets, growing to 9 with the addition of Pulaski and Chesterfield). In addition, more capacity needed to outreach to local jails and probation and parole districts.
- ❖ **Housing** continues to be the biggest barrier for this population due to criminal history and lack of financial resources. This need has been exacerbated due to the rise in housing costs and the lack of housing resources in the community. Housing is the number one service request for the JIS program.
- ❖ Recently released individuals from jail and prison continue to have challenges **securing IDs** for housing, employment, and benefits/financial assistance due to

stringent DMV ID requirements and delays in receiving supporting identity documents (birth certificates and Social Security cards).

- ❖ **Re-entry** for veterans being released from incarceration has been especially challenging due to the lack of housing options, program closures, and limited availability of resources.

- ❖ **Local and regional jail discharge planning gaps and veteran identification.** Jails continue to struggle with discharge planning due to limited reentry staff. Most referrals received from the jails are self-referrals from veterans recently released who normally need connections to housing, benefits, and employment. Local jails also have issues with **veteran identification**. Most jails are not using the VA's *Veterans Reentry Search Services* (VRSS) system. There are currently only 11 local and regional jails in Virginia using the VRSS system.

#### **14. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans?**

VVFS helps Service Members, Veterans, and their families access care and support for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services needs. Often this can prevent a crisis and/or suicide. VVFS staff strive to help SMVF link to services and benefits in federal, state and local systems. In addition, leadership team members serve on statewide advisory committees (on justice, housing, peer support, behavioral health and suicide prevention services) and form strategic partnerships that enhance systems of care for SMVF.

#### **15. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?**

By helping the veteran, it helps the Commonwealth by continuing to ensure Virginia is the most military and veteran friendly state and provides comprehensive and wrap-around services for those residing in Virginia. Ready access to care and supportive services helps veterans and families Stay, Work, and Thrive in Virginia.

#### **16. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?**

The VJS will be focusing outreach (IOKRs) to local and regional jails and veterans on community supervision (probation/parole).

JIS program-specific strategic opportunities are centered around veteran identification in local and regional jails by marketing and training jail staff on using the VA's Veterans Reentry Search Services (VRSS) system. In addition, the program will be assisting the Virginia Supreme Court Office of the Executive staff on expanding veterans treatment dockets in Virginia and provide the Virginia Veteran Treatment Docket Implementation Curriculum training to interested jurisdictions.

The JIS program and VJS will be partnering with VADOC Probation and Parole Districts to provide support to veterans on community supervision. As of September 2023, VADOC noted there were 2,014 veterans on community supervision. The JIS program is working with VADOC on strategies to support veterans that need assistance and connections to resources.

**17. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?**

VVFS assists a range of veterans and their family members with complex needs including criminal justice involvement, caregiver support, homelessness and other housing issues, and behavioral health needs. VVFS staff are a crucial touchpoint and provide support to navigate through complex systems of care.

If VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists positions are not expanded this will impact the outreach to jails, services to Veteran Treatment Dockets, and jeopardize support for veterans being supervised by VADOC probation and parole districts.