**Texas Veterans Commission**

**Veterans Services Advisory Committee**

**Recommendations to Address**

**Justice Involved Veterans**

**October 12, 2021**

**DRAFT**

**Executive Summary**

The Texas Veterans Commission requested that the Veterans Services Advisory Committee (VSAC) conduct a review of current services to Texas veterans in the areas of suicide prevention, incarcerated veterans, and homelessness, and make recommendations to improve services to veterans in these three service areas. The VSAC assigned its members in subcommittees for the three services areas.

The VSAC completed its review of documents and obtained information from TVC staff. Subsequent to these efforts the VSAC developed three recommendations to compliment TVC efforts in support of homeless veterans, and presented them to the Commissioners on August 12, 2021 for their approval.

The VSAC then began its review of information related to TVC support of Veterans Involved in Justice. On September 3, 2021 the Justice Involved Veterans (JIV) subcommittee received from Dr. Blake Harris and his staff on TVC efforts in behalf of JIV. On September 21, 2021 the subcommittee developed draft recommendation and also was provided further information by Blake Harris and his two JIV coordinators. The subcommittee presented to the entire VSAC with its draft recommendations for approval on November 19, 2021.

**Background on Veteran Homelessness in Texas**

The VSAC JIV subcommittee was informed that approximately 10 percent of arrests in Texas are veterans.

The Texas Department of Public Safety 2019 Crime in Texas Report counted **659,943 adult arrests** in Texas. This report on crime in Texas during 2019 is compiled from data submitted to the Texas Department of Public Safety’s Uniform Crime Reporting Bureau by **1,207 Texas Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police.**

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice Annual Review Fiscal Year 2020 reflected that as of August 20, 2020, **TDCJ housed 7,345** veterans and **7,757** veterans were identified as **under parole supervision**.

**Federal Level JIV Efforts:**

VA is making a system-wide effort to ensure access to services for the justice-involved Veteran population at risk for homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness, and physical health problems.  The Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) program was created to provide timely access to VA services for eligible justice-involved Veterans to avoid unnecessary criminalization and incarceration of Veteran offenders with mental illness**.**

**State Level Efforts for JIV:**

**Texas Department of Criminal Justice Reentry and Integration Division:** The TDCJ and the Veterans Administration (VA) maintain an agreement for verification of veteran information through an electronic file transfer utilizing the Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS). Using this data, veterans nearing release are identified at which time the Reentry Veterans Services Coordinator notifies the Veterans Integrated Service Network and Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN) staff as well as reentry case manager to initiate the benefit application process prior to release. The reentry case manager will also discuss eligibility requirements, possible enrollment into the VA health care system and assist veterans in completing the benefits application packet. Case managers also provide offenders’ information regarding Hazelwood Act benefits, contact information for the MVPN representative and Texas Veterans Commission county service officer for the area where the offender plans to reside upon release. Medical provider information from the VA website is furnished and post release appointments with the VA for medical continuity of care are initiated, as needed.

**TVC Support for JIV:**

**The Veterans Mental Health Department (VMHD) under Blake Harris has recently established a JIV program and hired two JIV coordinators. The Justice Involved Veteran (JIV) Program works to improve veteran services across the entire criminal justice continuum. The JIV Coordinators serve as resource to provide technical assistance and training to all Veteran Treatment Courts across Texas. The JIV Program also partners with the local and state law enforcement to deliver officers relevant trainings such as trauma affected veterans and crisis intervention strategies. JIV Coordinators also collaborate with the local jail and state prison systems to better ensure that incarcerated veterans have access to veteran-specific services and programming. The HIV coordinators also collaborate with TVC claims staff and Military Veteran Peer Network personnel to assist JIVs.**

**JIV Program References**

**Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) - TCJC identified that the systems for tracking veterans incarcerated were in need of improvement.**

**Department of Veterans Affairs Biennial Outreach Report to Congress 2020 -** The active users of the Veterans Reentry Search Service increased by 10.3% from 363 active users in 2018 to 400 active users in 2019.

**Recommendations:**

**Recommendation #1: The Veterans Mental Health Department (VMHD) of TVC will ensure that downloadable copies of the following documents are provided on the TVC website during its current update:**

**A Guidebook for Veterans Incarcerated in Texas**

[IVP 3 (texasjailproject.org)](http://www.texasjailproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/TX-Guidebook-May-2016.pdf)

**Department of Veterans Affairs Justice Involved Veterans Fact Sheet**

[Justice Involved Veterans (va.gov)](https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/misc/JusticeInvolved.pdf)

**Department of Veterans Affairs Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors**

[Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors - Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (va.gov)](https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp)

**Recommendation #2: The Veterans Mental Health Department (VMHD) of TVC will develop an annual outreach report that reflects the following:**

* **Number of visits to correctional facilities**
* **Number JIVs provided assistance**
* **Number of outreach events conducted**
* **Number of JIVs identified in the** Veterans Reentry Search Service in the course of assisting Texas law enforcement personnel.