

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Thursday, March 29, 2012  
9:00 AM  
Conference Room 211**

**RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 2798, HD3, SD1, RELATING TO VETERANS  
TREATMENT COURT**

**Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the committee.**

My name is Charles Ota and I am the Vice President for Military Affairs at The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii (The Chamber). I am here to state The Chamber's strong support of House Bill No.2798, HD3, SD1, Relating to Veterans Treatment Court.

The measure proposes to establish a veteran's treatment court within the judiciary.

The Chamber's Military Affairs Council (MAC) serves as the liaison for the state in matters relating to the U.S. military and provides oversight for the State's multi-billion dollar defense industry.

We concur with the amendments made to HB 2798 as proposed in HD3 and SD1.

We would like to reiterate that a 2011 study prepared by the RAND Corporation into the impact of military spending in Hawaii revealed that Hawaii is home to more than 101,500 veterans. This is a substantial portion of Hawaii's population of 1.3 million residents.

Furthermore, the veteran population is growing due to the large number of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is estimated that upwards of 31% of those returning from the stressful combat environments in Iraq and Afghanistan are facing difficult periods of adjustment upon returning to

civilian life. Some have suffered severe combat wounds and debilitating combat experiences such as traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Establishing a veteran's treatment court system with the use of veterans to serve as mentors has proven to be highly successful in providing assistance to disoriented veterans who otherwise can be rehabilitated into society and become productive citizens in the community.

We are also mindful that Hawaii's veteran population includes hundreds of older veterans of prior wars such as the Vietnam War. These veterans will also benefit from a veteran's treatment court system as it could take years before symptoms of PTSD surface and cause behavioral disorders.

In light of the above, the MAC recommends that House Bill 2798 be approved and funded in FY2012/2013.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

**From:** [PBMtestimony](#)  
**To:** [WAM Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** FW: HB 2798 HD3, SD1 RELATING TO A VETERANS TREATMENT COURT;  
**Date:** Thursday, March 29, 2012 8:37:14 AM

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## Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

Rep. Henry Aquino, Chair  
Rep. Ty Cullen, Vice Chair  
Hawaii State Capitol  
415 S. Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
Email: [PBMtestimony@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:PBMtestimony@capitol.hawaii.gov)

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**From:** Edward Cruickshank [<mailto:edward.cruickshank@gmail.com>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 29, 2012 3:48 AM  
**To:** PBMtestimony  
**Subject:** HB 2798 HD3, SD1 RELATING TO A VETERANS TREATMENT COURT;

To: Senator David Y. Ige, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair  
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS.

My name is Edward R Cruickshank and I am President of Oahu Veterans's Council. I am submitting testimony in support of HB 2798 HD3,SD1. This is for the establishment of the temporary veterans treatment count within the first Judicial circuit court. The hearing is scheduled for Thursday 29, 2012 at 9:00 am in conference room 211.

I'm sorry for my late testimony in favor of the bill, but I did call both Senators Ige's and Senator's Kidani's offices Wednesday afternoon, and said I would be submitting written testimony in support.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me on my cell at 4783299.

Sincerely yours,

Edward R Cruickshank



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**  
Spark M. Matsunaga Medical Center  
459 Patterson Road  
Honolulu HI 96819-1522

March 28, 2012

Dear Ways And Means Committee Members:

As Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) and also as a US Army Veteran, I appreciate this opportunity to **strongly support HB 2798 HD3 – SD1**, a bill for the establishment of a temporary **Veterans Treatment Court (VTC)** in Hawaii.

VA PIHCS is prepared and willing to partner with the Judiciary. We have hired a full-time Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, and also intend to create a VTC Mentorship Coordinator to assist the VTC initiative. VA also continues to collaborate with non-profit enterprises in our community to enhance VA Veterans Justice Outreach and Reentry programs, Homeless Outreach and Mental Health programs among others, to better assist some of our most deserving citizens.

VA PIHCS will continue to invest in the **resources** necessary to meet the needs of our Veterans. In addition to the data submitted by **Dr. Kenneth Hirsch, regarding VA PIHCS PTSD Treatment Costs**, which VA absorbs, VA Pacific Islands Health Care System also offers **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)/Post Concussion Syndrome Program** services to Veterans, which include neuropsychological testing, speech pathology and physician support at an approximate cost of almost **\$5,500** per patient/year.

In addition to the medical care, more resources are used in the VA PIHCS Veterans Justice Outreach Program. Upon establishment of a Hawaii Veterans Treatment Court, the VA Mentor Coordinator position for VTC will be filled, estimated as a GS-11, with salary and benefits of \$96,867. The existing Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator – currently focuses on reentry, but would work with the VTC. The GS 12 salary and benefits are \$116,105, the total costs for FTE are **\$212,972**.

In addition to the healthcare services provided by the VA PIHCS, there is regional Honolulu Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) assistance as well. The VBA has a full-time Homeless and Incarcerated Veteran Outreach Coordinator, who directs Veterans to many opportunities for incarcerated, reentry, and/or homeless Veterans. Assisting the homeless may at times help prevent some from further involvement with the judicial system.

The salary range for the aforementioned VBA position is about **\$70,000**, salary and benefits. The current coordinator spends about 30% of his time assisting homeless or incarcerated Veterans. However, there are other VBA employees involved after claims are submitted. The Coordinator is a part of a team of two other employees whose salaries are both approximately **\$100,000** with salaries and benefits. They spend about 75% of their 8-hour day working the claim process of the same Veteran claim. In addition, two more employees are involved with these same Veterans claims and their salaries are even higher. The last two spend less time on these claims, about 20% of their day. The VBA multi-faceted claims process is a challenging and time-intensive process, necessary to ensure the individual needs of the Veterans are met and they are receiving their entitled benefits.

In the process of assisting homeless Veterans, VA often finds some benefits that a Veteran will start utilizing. There are many Veterans who have yet to apply for VA benefits (e.g. compensation & pension/disability claims, vocational rehab and retraining, educational GI bill, VA home loan etc.) and for their enrollment in VA Health Care.

VBA refers these Veterans to the health side of the VA (VA Pacific Islands Health Care System), where they might receive free health care, or refer them to homeless shelters.

Other potential benefits:

- Veterans may receive VA pension benefits of \$1,020 a month or more if they have dependents.
- Veterans may receive service connected disability compensation of \$127 to \$2,769 or more.
- Veterans may receive vocational rehabilitation benefits leading to free training or education.
- Some [OEF/OIF] Veterans might receive Post 911 GI Bill benefits of free tuition plus a housing allowance each month (\$600 to \$2,000).

The VA recognizes that in many instances Veterans may become involved with the judicial system as a direct result of undiagnosed and diagnosed injuries they obtained while in service to their country. With the increasing numbers of active duty service members, Guard and Reserve personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to the US, specifically to Hawaii, the challenges of readjustment are indeed a community concern; especially when a Veteran is involved in the criminal justice system.

Incarceration can leave a long-lasting impact on individuals and the community, even after the sentence is completed. It hinders and reduces a Veteran's opportunity to obtain employment and housing and fulfill basic needs. It also increases the chances/rates of recidivism, homelessness and even suicide.

According to the Hawaii Department of Corrections (Nov. 2011), 408 inmates have self-identified themselves as Veterans. However, these numbers do not include federal inmates residing in the state of Hawaii. The Judiciary has also identified **30-50 possible candidates** who would be eligible immediately for a VTC. Establishing a VTC in Hawaii and joining more than **100 similar courts** across the country, which are already experiencing successful outcomes, would achieve a social and financial benefit to our Veterans and the community.

There are an estimated 127,600 Veterans throughout Hawaii and the Pacific Islands and 46,000 are Veterans enrolled in VA PIHCS. There continues to be a significant increase in the amount of OEF and OIF Veterans, those who have deployed in support of the operations in Afghanistan and/or Iraq.

Largely due to our increased/improved collaborative outreach initiatives, we are currently seeing a rise in our VA PIHCS healthcare enrollment by 80 per week, on average. VAPIHCS is committed to serving our Veterans and to supporting the rehabilitation of this population of Veterans.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I ask humbly that you consider passing HB 2798 - a bill for the establishment of a temporary Veterans Treatment Court in Hawaii. Rehabilitation, rather than incarceration in many cases, will have an enduring positive impact on our community. Our Veterans have served selflessly in defense of our freedoms, and done so without asking for anything in return. Establishing a VTC would give many involved in the judicial system an opportunity for a second chance - a chance that could give them back their future. In conclusion, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to show my support, and continued commitment of resources to the establishment of a Veterans Treatment Court and to the Veterans' Justice Outreach Initiative.

Sincerely,

James Hastings, MD., FACP  
Director, VA Pacific Islands Health Care System  
808-433-0100