

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 408

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS

Hearing Date: March 17, 2021 8:00 AM

Marilyn Hartman

Member and Advocate, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Central Texas

Austin, TX

I support this bill. Mental health courts, jail diversion, and community treatment are far better policies than incarceration for people with mental illnesses and/or substance use disorder.

Anthony Gamage

Self / Student

Houston, TX

I encourage this bill to make it possible for our veterans to get the assistance they need when struggling with the justice system. Many of the issues that take a veteran down the path to becoming an offender have roots connected to their combat or some other traumatic experience they served our country. It is a rare veteran who fights in a conflict that does not come home with mental illness. Studies have shown this and that these emotional and mental illnesses continue with them for the rest of their lives, oftentimes the hidden factor behind their offense. I am not excusing poor decision-making that goes against the law. But I hope to stir compassion and understanding for our brave, committed veterans who willingly gave their lives in service to our country for the freedoms we value. Thank you.

Linda Mikolajek, Ms.

NAMI central Texas

Austin, TX

Hello, I am writing to ask you to please support HB 408, which relates to the administration of a veterans treatment court program. By supporting this bill it will help with post booking jail diversion programs which would redirect individuals in custody that have a suspected mental health or substance use disorder to specialized Courts and Community Bay Street and Period participation in mental health court has shown to reduce subsequent he rest in days of incarceration. It is important not to criminalize honest and helping people who have serious mental illnesses instead of sticking them in jails, especially our veterans it is very important.

Please support HB408 and vote in favor of this important bill.

Linda Mikolajek

Jeff Mikolajek, Mr.

NAMI Central Texas

Austin, TX

I am in support of how to feel 408. I would appreciate your positive vote on this bill due to its ability to help many veterans with serious mental illness and getting the help they need to maintain their lives now that they are done protecting our lives!

I am a mental health advocate and would be glad to help you answer any questions on this bill. Thank you for your help in supporting mental illness in our great state of Texas!

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Jeff Mikolajek
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Eric Kunish, Advocacy Chair-Central Texas Affiliate
National Alliance on Mental Illness
Austin, TX

I support this bill recognizing peer support.

Virginia Simonson, LTC, USA - Retired
North DFW Chapter, Military Officers of America
Flower Mound, TX

I am among the almost 200 Veterans and spouses of the DFW Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America strongly in favor of HB 408. A number of our chapter members have been involved with the Denton County Veterans Treatment Court as mentors and resource providers since 2012. We have seen so many Veterans successfully reintegrated into our community and have heard the gratitude of the formerly fractured families on the path to rebuild their lives. This bill improves the chances of a Veteran completing the court program because it makes it easier for the participant to maintain employment while completing the rigorous requirements of the program. The first 3 months of a Veterans Treatment Court program are especially challenging - requiring multiple counseling sessions, probation appointments, mentor meetings and court dockets. It also requires multiple re-education classes related to the specific offenses committed, like Impaired Drivers Education, Victim Impact Panels, family violence counseling, and financial management classes, to name a few. All of these evidence-based elements combine to make Veterans Treatment Court Programs among the most successful among specialty courts, with recidivism rates significantly lower than the State average. Most importantly, the graduates of these programs, finally get the mental health treatment that is essential for them to move on from service-related trauma and become the successful community members they were meant to be.