Hello,

This is the third release of the rundown, a series of broadcasts aimed at explaining some of what the American Judges Association (AJA), and I as your president, do on behalf of the members of the Association.

Last week I attended the Michigan Association of Treatment Court Professionals (MATCP) annual conference held in my home town of Novi, Michigan. I attended, not only in my capacity as president of the AJA, but also as a member of MATCP’s board and as a presenter in a breakout session concerning the supervision of drug addicted defendants.

The high point of the conference was a plenary session “Champions for Our Healing Heroes” which focused on Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC). Justice Mary Beth Kelly, from the Michigan Supreme Court, started the session with a quote from Abraham Lincoln, “To care for him who shall have borne the battle.” She asked the more than 700 attendees to listen to the stories of people involved in Michigan’s VTC’s such as Brigadier General Michael J. Stone(pictured on the left with an attendee). The culmination of the presentation however, came from a veteran named Chris. He described his entry into VTC, explaining: “The first thing the judge did was thank me for my service to my country...(and) it was now my country’s turn to serve me and to help me get back on the right path.” Chris continued: “When I was told to be proud of my service and that the court was going to do everything they could and everything in their power to help me get back to being proud and happy with who I am, it was a huge difference right there for me.” He ended his presentation by describing how the program saved his life and restored his sense of honor.

Those of you who attended the AJA conference in Las Vegas will recall a session about VTC’s and the impact of post traumatic stress on returning veterans. One of the presenters was the director of Justice for Vets, Melissa Fitzgerald (some of you will recognize her as a star from the television series West Wing). In that presentation, Ms. Fitzgerald described the basic structure of VTC’s and how they can help veterans like Chris. If you are interested in leaning more about VTC’s, you can find a pdf of that presentation here: http://www.amjudges.org/conferences/2014Annual/Materials, or for more information, you can also visit the Justice for Vets website: http://www.justiceforvets.org/

In October, the AJA will be releasing a new white paper. It will focus on the impact of procedural fairness in all types of speciality courts, including VTC’s. Chris eloquently described that impact when he said that he would never forget how he was treated by members of the VTC team and how important that was to his recovery.
As it happens I was Chris’s judge, and it was my understanding of the four guiding principles of procedural fairness, first learned by attending an AJA conference that shaped my approach to Chris and his fellow veterans. If you are supervising a specialty court and are not familiar with the principles of procedural fairness, then I suggest you go to the AJA website and click on the link to the association’s White Papers: http://www.amjudges.org/publications/, and perhaps after reading the White Paper on Procedural Fairness think about joining us October 4 - 7 in Seattle to learn how you can improve the operation of your specialty court.

That's it for now. I hope to write again soon. Thanks and be well. Brian