



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
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CLERK OF THE BOARD
OF SUPERVISORS

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: June 4, 2019

01

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**VETERANS MOVING FORWARD: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CARE
COORDINATION FOR SUCCESSFUL REENTRY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

San Diego County is home to one of the largest veteran communities in the United States. Our County and this Board of Supervisors has a proven history of supporting local veterans, their families and fostering collaboration between agencies to ensure resources are more accessible. The County is committed to strengthening the resources it provides and bridging the gap between services and those who need it most. It is well known that adjusting to civilian life is very challenging. While many veterans are thriving members of our community, there are still some that face a number of obstacles, especially our veterans who are involved in the criminal justice system.

In 2013, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, in partnership with the San Diego Veterans Administration (VA), implemented the Veterans Moving Forward (VMF) program at the Vista Detention Facility. The VMF program is a veteran-only incentive-based housing unit for male inmates who have served in the United States military. Over the past three years, we have seen a significant increase in the number of veterans booked into our County jails. In 2018, there were 637 veterans booked into County jail with an average of three bookings per veteran.

During the same three years, SANDAG was conducting a process and impact evaluation of the VMF program. In March 2019, SANDAG released their report of the VMF program, based on their study which compared two groups of veterans - one group of 141 veterans who lived in a veterans-only housing unit and the other group which were housed in a detention facility with the general population. VMF is described by SANDAG as a unit "dedicated to assisting incarcerated male veterans by providing them the necessary in-custody treatment, services, and community linkages to reduce their chance of incarceration." This type of therapeutic community creates the conditions where an "environment of responsibility and accountability is promoted, and positive participation and offender behavior is rewarded through quality of life privileges and responsibilities." Also described was the approach behind the development of the program and a

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“core goal when creating VMF was to structure an environment for veterans to draw upon the positive aspects of their shared military culture, create a safe place for healing and rehabilitation, and foster positive peer connections.”

The SANDAG report pointed to several key components of success which included the assistance of a multi-disciplinary team to support reentry transition for individuals needing additional assistance. However, the report also pointed to key areas for improvement noting “there appeared to be a few areas that could be further strengthened in partnership with the VA and connections to other community service providers, including meeting basic needs, housing, and employment.” The VMF program has identified three top areas of need - housing assistance, substance use disorder treatment, and financial assistance.

With today’s proposed actions, the County commits to further strengthen Community Care Coordination for participants in the VMF program. Community Care Coordination, also known as C3, was developed through our Integrative Services department. It is a multi-disciplinary team consisting of Case Managers and Peer Support Specialists who act as personal advocates to coordinate care and housing for justice involved individuals following the Whole Person Wellness approach. The recommendations before you are intended to address the challenges our veterans will face upon release. By identifying a multi-disciplinary team to advocate for each veteran and help them to access the resources they need, develop their self-regulation skills, and acquire the training necessary to move beyond incarceration, we can improve outcomes for participants of the VMF program and help our veterans to live healthy, safe and thriving lives.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR KRISTIN GASPARI AND SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a plan to strengthen Community Care Coordination for participants in the Veterans Moving Forward program at the Vista Detention Facility, including in the plan options for acquiring or leasing housing and vouchers.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to identify and provide additional vocational training space for the Veterans Moving Forward program at the Vista Detention Facility, and work with community partners to develop job training and certification opportunities for veterans while in custody, with the pathways established to further those opportunities upon release.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board within 180 days with a presentation of the Veterans Moving Forward program and a proposed implementation plan.

FISCAL IMPACT

N/A

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

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BACKGROUND

San Diego County is home to one of the largest veteran communities in the United States. Our County and this Board of Supervisors has a proven history of supporting local veterans, their families, and fostering collaboration between agencies to ensure resources are more accessible. The County is committed to strengthening the resources it provides and bridging the gap between services and those who need it most. It is well known that adjusting to civilian life is very challenging. While many veterans are thriving members of our community, there are still some that face a number of obstacles, especially our veterans who are involved with the criminal justice system.

In 2013, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, in partnership with the San Diego Veterans Administration (VA), implemented the Veterans Moving Forward (VMF) program at the Vista Detention Facility. The VMF program is a veteran-only incentive-based housing unit for male inmates who have served in the United States military. Over the past three years, we have seen a significant increase in the number of veterans booked into our County jails. In 2018, there were 637 veterans booked into County jail with an average of three bookings per veteran.

During the same three years, SANDAG was conducting a process and impact evaluation of the VMF program. In March 2019, SANDAG released their report of the VMF program, based on their study which compared two groups of veterans - one group of 141 veterans who lived in a veterans-only housing unit and the other group which were housed in a detention facility with the general population. VMF is thoughtfully described by SANDAG as a unit "dedicated to assisting incarcerated male veterans by providing them the necessary in-custody treatment, services, and community linkages to reduce their chance of incarceration." This type of therapeutic community creates the conditions where an "environment of responsibility and accountability is promoted, and positive participation and offender behavior is rewarded through quality of life privileges and responsibilities." Also described was the approach behind the development and a "core goal when creating VMF was to structure an environment for veterans to draw upon the positive aspects of their shared military culture, create a safe place for healing and rehabilitation, and foster positive peer connections."

The SANDAG report pointed to several key components of success which included the assistance of a multi-disciplinary team to support reentry transition for individuals needing additional assistance. Based on the findings, the report also pointed to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Because the VMF program was implemented without any additional resources or budget and resulted in fewer rule violations and other positive outcomes, it is encouraging to consider what other low-cost changes could be implemented that would increase the quality of the detention experience for both staff and inmates.
- While being able to create and maintain a program without any dedicated funding speaks to the strength of existing partnerships, the Sheriff's Department commitment to veterans, and the collaboration across agencies, it is a challenge that was evidenced by schedules and curriculums that changed by necessity. Having a dedicated person to identify community

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partners and serve as a conduit between screening and training would be a helpful addition to this type of effort.

- While the feedback from clients and outcome results showed the positive effect of the VMF program, there appeared to be a few areas that could be further strengthened in partnership with the VA and connections to other community service providers, including meeting basic needs, housing, and employment. With only about three in five clients linked to outside services, exploring the barriers, as well as implementing additional best practices (e.g., transportation assistance) may improve these connections and in turn transitions to the community.

Additionally, a report recommendation that should be considered among participants suggests:

- Determining the appropriate client eligibility criteria for a veteran-only housing unit can be challenging. There may be a difference of opinion between staff and clients regarding how important readiness to change is, as well as other factors related to mental health issues. As part of this evaluation, some clients felt that having veterans in the program not committed to positive change had a negative impact on the environment overall. Programs may want to consider a more formal assessment for inclusion or a probation period prior to full inclusion in the unit.

With today's proposed actions, the County commits to further strengthen Community Care Coordination for participants in the VMF program. Community Care Coordination, also known as C3, was developed through our Integrative Services department. It is a multi-disciplinary team consisting of Case Managers and Peer Support Specialists who act as personal advocates to coordinate care and housing for justice involved individuals following the Whole Person Wellness approach. In the context of our County jail system, the C3 approach is being implemented by Integrative Services' Livability and Justice Unit after extensive coordination with the Sheriff, Probation Department, District Attorney, Behavioral Health Services, and a range of additional partner entities. Integrative Services is already positioned to support ensuring this initiative is a success.

The recommendations before you are intended to address the challenges our veterans will face upon release. Utilizing the C3 approach, we can leverage and strengthen the collaborative efforts of multiple programs and community partners, such as the VA Veterans Justice Outreach and the District Attorney's Veterans Empowerment Program. Additionally, the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) has a dedicated Office of Military & Veterans Affairs which assists veterans to obtain benefits from federal, state and local agencies and provides advocacy to the veteran community regarding entitlement rights to federal, state and local benefit programs. Through HHSA, the County also funds the Courage to Call program, which is a confidential, veteran-staffed 24/7 helpline dedicated to assisting active duty military personnel, veterans, reservists and guard members. Courage to Call Peer-Support Specialists and Peer Navigators understand the rigors of the military and military family life, constant deployments, transitioning out of the military and navigating veteran services. As well, VMF is proud of the successful volunteer-driven mentorship program led by the American Combat Veterans of War (ACVOW) who have been providing peer-mentorship to the veterans in the VMF program for several years.

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The partnership with ACVOW volunteers has been an invaluable resource to the veterans both in custody and as they transition back to the community.

We must strengthen the County's support for these efforts and identify a sustainable plan and funding opportunities to continue these partnerships. By identifying a multi-disciplinary team to advocate for each veteran and help them to access the resources they need, develop their self-regulation skills, and acquire the training necessary to move beyond incarceration, we can improve outcomes for participants of the VMF program and help our veterans to live healthy, safe and thriving lives.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's item supports the County of San Diego's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan through the Living Safely initiative by strengthening services and collaboration with community partners to fully implement a balanced-approach model that reduces crime by holding offenders accountable while providing them access to rehabilitation.

Respectfully submitted,



KRISTIN GASPAR
Supervisor, Third District



JIM DESMOND
Supervisor, Fifth District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A - Veterans Moving Forward: Process and Impact Evaluation Results of the San Diego County Sheriff's Department VMF Program

[Note: Due to the large size of this attachment, it will only be available online through the Clerk of the Board's website as a supporting document for this agenda item.]

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: Yes No

WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED

 Yes No

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:

N/A

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

N/A

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:

N/A

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:

N/A

ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):

N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Supervisor Kristin Gaspar and Supervisor Jim Desmond

OTHER CONCURRENCE(S): N/A

CONTACT PERSON(S):

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