



Kansas 7th Judicial District, Douglas County

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Updated: August 2026

vtc team contact information

The VTC team is an interdisciplinary and interagency group, brought together for the purpose of supporting justice involved veterans as they seek recovery.

VTC Judge:

Hon. Amy Hanley
Assistant: Kris Knowles
(785)832-5265

VTC Coordinator:

Stephanie Ruszczyk
(785) 832-5870
sruszczyk@dgcoks.gov

Assistant District Attorney:

William J Skepnek, Jr.
(785) 841-0211
wskepnek@dgcoks.gov

Defense Counsel:

Karen Ebmeier
(785)278-1094
ebmeierlaw@protonmail.com

VTC CSO:

Mary Martinez
Office: (785) 832-5225
Cell: (785)344-8402
mmartinez@dgcoks.gov

KU Veterans Legal Support Clinic

Jeff Stoll
(785)864-6100
vlsc@ku.edu

Bert Nash CMHC:

Tunmi Adebanjo MSW
(785) 330-8155
oadebanjo@bertnash.org

DCCCA:

Julia Parker, LPC, NCC, LMAC
785-830-8238
lparker@dccca.org

VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System

VJO: Christine Strohm, LMSW
(913)421-6999
Christine.Strohm99@va.gov

Douglas County Sherriff's Office:

Reentry Officer, Rebecca Sudja
(785)832-5113
rsudja@dgso.org

Lawrence Police Department:

Mjr. Casey Cooper
(785) 830-7400
cooper@lkpd.org

Welcome

To our new participant,

Welcome to the Seventh Judicial District of Kansas Veterans Treatment Court (VTC). You have been selected for this program because our team believes that you are a valued member of our community, capable of change, and willing to work hard in treatment. We believe you will take on this mission for yourself, your community, and your fellow veterans.

This manual has been put together to help you know what to expect while in VTC. We want you to succeed in this program and want you to be prepared to follow the guidelines of the court by having a clear picture of how the program works, who you will work with, and what will happen if expectations are not met.

Thank you for your services to the United States Armed Forces, and your willingness to engage in this specialty court program.

Respectfully,

Honorable Amy Hanley, VTC Judge
Veterans Treatment Court Coordinator
Douglas County District Court, Division I
111 E. 11th St, Lawrence, KS 66044

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview of the Veterans Treatment Court **Page 5**

- Mission Statement
- Changes In the VTC Team
- Updates to the participant Handbook

Program Participation **Page 5**

- Your commitment to VTC
- Rules and Expectations
 - Rules
 - Alcohol and Drug Screening
 - Medication Approval
 - Treatment Plan
 - Honesty and Communication
 - Relationships and Family Involvement
 - Obeying Laws and Court Orders
- Court Supervision
 - Home and Community Visits
 - Management Team Meetings
 - Communication
- Mentors and Peer Supports
 - Veteran Mentors
 - Peer Support and Recovery Communities

Confidentiality **Page 10**

- Why Confidentiality is Important
- Legal Protections for Your Confidentiality
- VTC Confidentiality Practices
- Your Responsibility to Maintain Privacy
- Exceptions to confidentiality
- Confidentiality After Program Completion
- Consequences of Breaking Confidentiality

Program Milestones **Page 14**

- Milestone Advancement
- VTC Milestones

Court Hearings **Page 16**

- Types of Hearings
 - Initial Hearing
 - Progress Hearings
 - Sanction Hearings
 - Graduation Hearings
- Expectations During Court Hearings
 - Attendance

- Clothing
- Behavior

Incentives, Sanctions, and Therapeutic Adjustments **Page 20**

- What are Incentives?
- What are Sanctions?
- What are Learning Activities?
- What are Therapeutic Adjustments?

Program Termination **Page 21**

- Reasons for Program Termination
- The Process for Program Termination
- Voluntary Termination
- What Happens After Program Termination?
- Appealing a Termination Decision
- Second or Subsequent Opportunities in Veterans Treatment Court

Graduation **Page 24**

- Criteria for graduation
- Graduation ceremony
- Life After Graduation

Asking for Help **Page 25**

- Asking for Help is Strength
- Steps for Asking for Help

OVERVIEW OF THE VETERANS TREATMENT COURT

The Douglas County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) was founded in 2025. Our goal is to promote public safety by helping veterans face challenges in their lives. We do that by helping veterans find mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and other services through the VA or other providers in our community.

VTC is a collaborative effort between the Eastern KS VA Health System, Seventh Judicial District of Kansas, Contracted Defense Counsel, Douglas County Sheriff's Office, Lawrence Police Department, Bert Nash CMHC, and DCCCA.

VTC is a voluntary program. To participate, you will be required to enter a plea agreement in your case. When you complete the five milestones of VTC over 15-18 months and graduate from the program, the State will dismiss your charges. If you do not complete VTC for any reason, your case will return to the original court for sentencing.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Seventh Judicial District of Kansas VTC (VTC) is to empower United States Veterans in building meaningful, productive, and law-abiding lives by connecting with community resources and treatment options to reach their full potential as members of our community.

CHANGES IN THE VTC TEAM

The VTC Team has the same members week to week. If someone leaves the team, or a new person joins, we will tell all participants and VTC Team members as soon as possible. Your CSO will give you a new phone list with the updates.

UPDATES TO THE PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

The rules and policies in this handbook may change over time. Changes will be reviewed by the VTC team before being added to this book. If any changes are made, you and your defense attorney will be given a new version of this handbook to review. Your CSO will also talk to you about the changes to make sure you understand.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Joining VTC is making a commitment to your own recovery. VTC helps veterans find mental health, substance abuse, and other care. You might get services at the VA, Bert Nash and DCCCA, or other providers in our community. You are expected to follow the program's

rules. The VTC rules are built to help you succeed. This section will tell you about the VTC rules and expectations.

YOUR COMMITMENT TO VTC

As a participant in the Veterans Treatment Court, you are expected to commit to engaging in VTC in a manner that is likely to be successful. Success in the VTC depends on you following the rules and doing what is asked. Your efforts will help you maintain sobriety, strengthen your family relationships, and ultimately achieve dismissal of your case.

RULES AND EXPECTATIONS

RULES

1. I will show up and I will not lie to my CSO or the VTC team.
2. I agree to work hard for all incentives.
3. I will accept help with obtaining sobriety and addressing my mental health.
4. I understand that successful completion of this program generally requires about 18 months of participation.
5. I understand that this program has been added to my conditions of release, and I am now required to complete the VTC program.
6. I am willing to attend alcohol and drug treatment, mental health counseling, medical appointments, educational classes and/or other social services as directed by the VTC Team.
7. I understand that I may be discharged from VTC if I am not in treatment as required, if I miss court, or if the team agrees that I am not participating as required in the VTC program.
8. I will not leave my treatment program without permission. I will talk to my CSO and my treatment providers if I need to adjust my treatment.
9. If I am terminated from a treatment program, I will contact my CSO immediately.
10. I agree to report to the CSO as directed.
11. I agree to attend intake and assessment appointments and participate in the development of a treatment plan.
12. I agree to submit to random alcohol and urinalysis testing. It is important to take the test, even if the test will be “positive.” I will be honest about drug and alcohol usage.
13. I agree to sign VTC forms, including release of information for my treatment providers.
14. I will bring prescriptions to my CSO for all medications prescribed to me.

15. I agree to take all medications prescribed to me or consult with my doctor and/or attorney as needed.
16. To advance to the next milestone, I will complete all requirements and work towards my recovery goals.
17. I will not associate with anyone in any specialty court program, or on Probation or Parole without permission from my CSO or team.
18. I understand anyone I ask to associate with may have to go through an approval process, including family and friends.
19. I will get permission from my CSO before leaving Douglas County.
20. I understand leaving the state of Kansas requires 2 week written prior approval from my CSO.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG SCREENING

You will be required to submit to observed urine drug tests, sweat patches, and/or breathalyzer to ensure treatment plan compliance with alcohol/drug abstinence. The results of the alcohol and drug tests will be provided to the VTC treatment team before each court appearance.

If you have used substances and expect to test positive, report that use to your CSO and take the test as scheduled. Do not miss your test because you are going to be positive. Do not miss court to avoid discussing a positive test. Lying, hiding your relapse, or attempting to cheat a drug test may receive a greater sanction than a positive screen.

You are responsible for any drugs or alcohol in your body. Secondhand smoke is not an excuse for a positive drug test. You must notify your CSO if a medication is prescribed to you and you must take such medication as directed. You are not allowed to take prescription medication that has not been prescribed to you.

Avoid taking over-the-counter medications and products (including mouthwash) that contain alcohol. Your CSO will have an additional list of prohibited substances.

MEDICATIONS

Inform your CSO of all prescription and over the counter medications you are taking. You will be asked to provide proof of your prescriptions. You are required to disclose any addiction history to your medication providers. All prescription medications should be taken as recommended by your provider. The VTC team may request permission to communicate with your provider. Concerns about abuse of prescribed medications may result in therapeutic level testing.

TREATMENT PLAN

You will work with providers to create a treatment plan that meets your individual needs. This plan will guide your recovery and may include substance use treatment, counseling, parenting classes, and other services designed to help you achieve stability.

- New services may be added as you move through the court, and your providers continue to assess your needs.
- You are expected to fully engage in your treatment plan, attend all scheduled appointments, and comply with the recommendations of your treatment providers.
- The VTC team will regularly review your progress and may adjust your treatment plan as needed.

HONESTY AND COMMUNICATION

If you have any questions, have a change in your life circumstances, or need additional information regarding your requirements for VTC, contact your attorney, the VJO, or your CSO. Please also let at least one VTC Team member know if you are going to be late for VTC. Only call one time and leave one message. Please make sure that you leave your full name and phone number where you can be reached.

RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Intimate relationships with other VTC participants or with anyone on probation or parole is prohibited. You must disclose all romantic relationships to your CSO. All family and friends must submit to an approval process by the CSO. If a relationship is likely to be a threat to the participant's safety and/or recovery, you may be asked to discuss the pro and cons of continuing the relationship.

Family Involvement: Your treatment plan may include family counseling or parenting classes to help strengthen your family relationships and improve your ability to care for your children. Supportive family members are welcome in court. Supportive family members are welcome in court and may be engaged by treatment providers with appropriate releases of information.

OBEYING LAWS AND COURT ORDERS

You must comply with all local, state, and federal laws. Any new legal charges or violations may result in sanctions or termination from VTC. If you have any contact with law enforcement or are arrested during your time in VTC, you must report it immediately to your CSO and the VTC team.

Representation: You have the right to legal representation throughout your participation in the VTC. Your attorney will help you navigate any legal issues related to your case.

Court Orders: You must comply with all court orders, including custody arrangements, protective orders, or any other legal obligations.

Court Supervision Activities

All participants are supervised by a Court Services Officer (CSO) on the VTC team. The CSO will work with you to set goals and find services to meet those goals. The CSO will help you change your habits and thinking so you can meet your goals. CSO's are also a source of accountability, helping you keep track of your goals and activities and reporting to the judge on your progress.

HOME AND COMMUNITY VISITS

As a VTC participant, you consent to the search of your person, vehicle, phone, and place of residence. Participants waive any expectation of privacy or 4th Amendment claims. The VTC CSO may visit your home or work as part of your supervision. This is to make sure you are following the rules of the program and to make sure you have a safe place to live and your basic needs are met. Follow any instructions given by the CSO and be honest about your situation.

MANAGEMENT TEAM MEETING(MTM)

Management Team Meetings are scheduled at least twice during VTC. The first meeting is around 30 days after you start VTC. The second meeting is around halfway through VTC. You will attend the meeting with your CSO, prosecutor, defense attorney, and treatment providers. These meetings are to review the requirements of VTC, your goals, and your treatment plan. Additional Management Team Meetings may be added if there are major changes to your plan.

COMMUNICATION

Please let at least one VTC Team member know if you are going to be late for VTC. Only call one time and leave one message. Please make sure that you leave your full name and phone number where you can be reached. If you have questions, have a change in your life circumstances, or need additional information, contact your CSO. If you have any concerns or questions about VTC you can also contact the VTC Coordinator.

MENTORS AND PEER SUPPORTS

VETERAN MENTORS

As a part of VTC, you will have a veteran mentor whenever possible. The Volunteer Veteran Mentor will act as a coach, guide, role model, advocate, and support person. The mentors will also attend scheduled court sessions when they are able to. Mentors themselves are Veterans. Every effort is made to recruit a diverse group of Veteran Mentors from all branches of the military and from various periods of service. The Judge may ask for the Mentor's input on your progress but does not get regular reports about what you talk about with the mentor. Mentors do not go the VTC Team meeting before court, and your confidential treatment information will not be shared with your mentor unless you choose to share it.

PEERS SUPPORT AND RECOVERY COMMUNITIES

Participants are required to engage in community-based supportive groups. Supports are based on the needs and interests of individual participants. The group must be accessible to you and meet on a regular weekly schedule in person or virtually. We encourage you to try a few activities and look for a group that you connect with.

This requirement can be met in a variety of ways such as:

- Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous Groups (AA, NA)
- SMART Recovery
- NAMI Kansas
- Community Children's Center or Parents as Teachers support groups
- Identity, affinity, and hobby groups

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your privacy and the privacy of other VTC participants are protected by strict legal and ethical guidelines. This section explains how confidentiality is maintained throughout the program, the legal protections you have, and your responsibility to respect the privacy of others.

WHY CONFIDENTIALITY IS IMPORTANT

Confidentiality helps create a safe and trusting space where you can openly share your challenges and progress in recovery. Maintaining confidentiality allows participants to engage fully in treatment and court proceedings without fear that personal information will be shared outside the program.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

HEALTH INSURANCE PORTABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT (HIPAA)

This federal law protects the privacy of your health information. HIPAA restricts how your medical records, treatment details, and other personal health information can be shared. Only authorized individuals, such as your treatment providers and the VTC team, will have access to your health information as needed for your participation in the program.

42 CFR PART 2 (CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS, TITLE 42, PART 2)

This federal regulation gives extra protection for people receiving treatment for substance use disorders. Under this law, information about your treatment for alcohol or drug use cannot be disclosed without your written consent, except in specific circumstances, such as medical emergencies or when required by law.

KANSAS STATE LAWS

State laws also protect your confidentiality and ensure that the details of your case, including information shared during court hearings and treatment sessions, are kept private. These laws work with federal regulations to ensure your privacy is fully protected.

VTC CONFIDENTIALITY PRACTICES

RESTRICTED ACCESS

Only members of your VTC team, including the judge, attorneys, CSO, and treatment providers, have access to your personal information. These team members are bound by confidentiality agreements and legal requirements to protect your privacy.

COURT HEARINGS

While VTC status hearings are generally open to the public, the details discussed about your treatment and progress are kept confidential within the court. Sensitive information will not be disclosed to the public, and the court may close certain hearings to protect your privacy if needed.

PRE-COURT STAFFING

The VTC team meets regularly in private to discuss your progress and make decisions about your treatment and court supervision services. These meetings are closed to the public, and the information shared during these sessions is strictly confidential.

TREATMENT RECORDS

Your treatment records are maintained by your providers and are only shared with the VTC team as needed. These records are kept secure and are protected by the same confidentiality laws that govern other medical records.

DOCUMENTATION

Any reports, assessments, or documents related to your participation in the VTC are stored securely and shared only with authorized individuals. VTC treatment information is stored in a separate database from criminal records. The court ensures that these documents are protected from unauthorized access.

SIGNED CONSENT

Before your personal information is shared between the VTC and treatment providers or other agencies, you will be asked to sign a Release of Information Form (ROI) for each agency. This form allows the VTC team and your treatment providers to share relevant information about your progress, treatment, and compliance with the program. The information shared under the ROI is strictly limited to what is necessary for your success in the program. You have the right to revoke the ROI at any time, but doing so may affect your participation in the VTC, as the team will no longer be able to monitor your treatment and progress.

Information VTC will need from your providers is generally:

- Treatment intervention used
- Treatment recommendations
- Treatment goals
- Appointment schedule and attendance
- Participation and engagement
- Diagnosis
- Medications
- Progress toward goals
- Graduation from treatment
- Medication list
- Safety concerns
- Billing information

Information the court is unlikely to request:

- Details about what you say to your therapist or provider in a private appointment
- Details about your trauma history shared in confidence
- Individual appointment notes

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO MAINTAIN PRIVACY

As a participant in the Veterans Treatment Court, you are responsible for protecting the privacy of others. This means that you must not disclose any information about fellow participants outside the program. Maintaining privacy is critical to fostering a supportive and respectful community within the VTC. Do not discuss other participants identities, personal stories, or treatment information with people outside of VTC and treatment services. Please also avoid engaging in any discussion of other participants that could be interpreted as gossip.

EXCEPTIONS TO CONFIDENTIALITY

While confidentiality is a cornerstone of the VTC, there are some situations where information may be shared without your consent. These situations are limited and generally involve issues of safety or legal obligations.

INFORMATION MAY BE DISCLOSED IN THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES:

Threats to Safety: If you say or do something that suggests you may harm yourself or others, the VTC team may be required to disclose this information to ensure your safety or the safety of others.

Abuse or Neglect: If there are concerns about the safety of children and vulnerable adults, such as suspected abuse or neglect, some members of the VTC team are legally obligated to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Court Orders: If a court order requires the release of information, VTC must comply. However, such disclosures are limited to the specific information requested by the court.

Medical Emergencies: If there is a medical emergency, your health information may be shared with healthcare providers to ensure you receive the necessary treatment.

CONFIDENTIALITY AFTER PROGRAM COMPLETION

Your responsibility to maintain confidentiality does not end when you leave VTC. The confidentiality agreement you sign extends beyond your time in the program, meaning you are expected to protect the privacy of fellow participants for life.

The VTC team is committed to keeping your personal information confidential even after you leave the program. Your treatment records and court documents will continue to be protected by confidentiality laws and will only be shared with authorized individuals as required by law, or as required by our VTC grant.

CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING CONFIDENTIALITY

If you fail to uphold confidentiality, whether by sharing information about fellow participants or breaching the privacy of your case, there may be consequences. Maintaining confidentiality is not only a legal obligation but also an ethical responsibility to the VTC community and your fellow participants.

PROGRAM MILESTONES

The VTC is a five-milestone program typically lasting 18 months or longer. You must successfully complete each milestone before transitioning to the next milestone. Each milestone has a key concept or focus. The CSO will provide support and guidance throughout each milestone of the treatment court in addition to verifying each milestone's requirements.

MILESTONE ADVANCEMENT

Advancement from each milestone will be determined by the judge with input from the VTC team. Each milestone has its own requirements for advancement. Before advancing, you will be asked to submit a Milestones Advancement Request Form that outlines how you have satisfied the criteria. You will also share your achievements, challenges, and future goals.

VTC MILESTONES

Milestone One: Courage

Courage is the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty despite fear or criticism. You will have achieved the courage milestone when you understand what is expected of you, from VTC and your treatment providers, and you are prepared to take actions toward change.

EXPECTED DURATION: 30-60 DAYS

- Complete drug and alcohol testing as scheduled
- Attend court every Wednesday at 12:00pm and bring your calendar
- Meet with CSO weekly or as scheduled
- Work with the VTC team and services providers to address any concerns related to housing & safety
- Attend recommended treatment and social service appointments
- Meet with VJO, DCCCA, or Bert Nash to collaborate on a service plan
- Complete a Management Team Meeting (MTM)
- Allow home visits with CSO and LEO for supportive assessment of needs
- Meet with a veteran mentor

Milestone Two: Commitment

Commitment is a pledge or dedication to a certain cause, activity, or principal. You will have achieved the commitment milestone when you are regularly going to treatment and building treatment relationships.

EXPECTED DURATION: 90 DAYS

- Complete drug and alcohol testing as scheduled
- Attend court every Wednesday at 12:00pm and bring your calendar
- Meet with CSO weekly or as scheduled
- Allow home and community visits at the digression of the CSO or as needed
- Work with the VTC team and services providers to address any concerns related to housing & safety
- Attend recommended treatment and social service appointments
- Meet with a VJO as needed
- Meet with VA Health, DCCCA, or Bert Nash providers as scheduled and follow through with treatment recommendations
- Select and engage with a mentor regularly
- Attend meetings with a supportive community regularly

Milestone Three: Integrity

Integrity is being honest and acting out or one's principles. You will achieve the integrity milestone when your behavior does not require you to be dishonest but instead shows the hard work you are doing towards recovery.

EXPECTED DURATION: 90-120 DAYS

- Complete drug and alcohol testing as scheduled
- Attend court on the second and fourth Wednesday at 12:00pm and bring your calendar
- Meet with CSO twice a month or as scheduled
- Allow home and community visits at the digression of the CSO or as needed
- Work with the VTC team and services providers to address any concerns related to housing & safety
- Attend all recommended treatment and social service appointments
- Meet with Veteran Mentor weekly or as needed
- Meet with a VJO as needed
- Meet with VA Health, DCCCA, or Bert Nash providers as scheduled and follow through with treatment recommendations
- Complete Management Team Meeting (MTM) to review and update treatment plan and address any concerns
- Work on Recovery skills
- Attend meetings with a supportive community regularly
- Work to build community connections outside of treatment court with people who support your recovery

Milestone Four: Honor

Honor is honesty, fairness, or integrity in one's beliefs and actions. You will achieve the Honor Milestone when you are stepping in to positive roles in your family, community, work, and/or education.

EXPECTED DURATION: 90-180 DAYS

- Complete drug and alcohol testing as scheduled
- Attend court on the fourth Wednesday at 12:00pm and bring your calendar
- Meet with CSO monthly or as needed
- Meet with VJO as needed
- Meet with VA Health, DCCCA, or Bert Nash providers as scheduled and follow through with treatment recommendations
- Work with the VTC team and services providers to address any concerns related to housing & safety
- Attend all treatment and social service appointments
- Review progress, risks, barriers, and relapse prevention strategies
- Continue to participate with veteran mentor
- Develop coping skills as needed
- Attend meetings with a supportive community regularly
- Attend enjoyable activities in the community
- Continue to build relationships with people who support your recovery

Milestone Five: Valor

Valor is honor plus dignity. It's gallant bravery and strength of mind and spirit. You will have achieved the final milestone of Valor when you have demonstrated that you are prepared to continue your recovery beyond Veterans Treatment Court.

EXPECTED DURATION: 90 DAYS

- Complete drug and alcohol testing as scheduled
- Attend court on the fourth Wednesday at 12:00pm and bring your calendar
- Meet with CSO as instructed
- Meet with VJO as needed
- Meet with VA Health, DCCCA, or Bert Nash providers as scheduled and follow through with treatment recommendations
- Take steps toward repairing damage caused by your actions if needed.
- Continuing to attend enjoyable activities in the community
- Continue to build relationships with people who support your recovery
- Review threats toward sustaining recovery and identify a path forward.

COURT HEARINGS

Court Hearings are scheduled to monitor your progress, address any challenges, and celebrate your achievements. These hearings also allow you to get direct feedback from the judge and the VTC team. Regular attendance is mandatory, and critical to your success in VTC. Supportive family members, friends, sponsors, and treatment providers are welcome to attend the court proceedings. This section will explain the different types of

hearings, what to expect, and the importance of your behavior and participation in the courtroom.

TYPES OF HEARINGS

There are several types of court hearings in the Veterans Treatment Court, each serving a specific purpose. The frequency and focus of these hearings will depend on your progress in the program and the phase you are in.

INITIAL HEARING

The initial hearing happens shortly after you are accepted into VTC. This hearing sets the stage for your journey in the VTC.

During the initial hearing:

- You will formally enter the program and review the participation agreement with the judge.
- The judge will explain the program's rules and expectations.
- The court will discuss your initial treatment plan and goals for Phase 1.
- You will meet the members of the VTC team, including your CSO, treatment providers, and any legal representatives involved in your case.

STATUS HEARINGS

Status hearings are regular check-ins with the court to monitor your progress. These hearings are scheduled weekly in the first phases of VTC, and less often as you progress.

During a status hearing:

- The judge and the VTC team may review your treatment progress, drug test results, attendance at required appointments, and any other relevant information.
- The court may discuss your compliance with the program's rules, as well as any challenges or obstacles you are facing.
- You will have the opportunity to speak with the judge and discuss your progress or ask for support if needed.
- If you are doing well, the court may provide incentives (rewards)
- If there are concerns about non-compliance, the court may impose sanctions (consequences) to address these issues
- If there are concerns about your treatment, adjustments may be recommended

PROGRESS HEARINGS

Progress hearings are used to review significant milestones in your journey, such as advancing to a new milestone of the program. Progress hearings offer an opportunity to

reflect on how far you've come and celebrate the milestones you've reached in your recovery and personal growth.

During a progress hearing:

- The Judge may review your Milestone Advancement Request, which outlines the progress you have made and your readiness to move to the next phase.
- Discuss your achievements in treatment, parenting, and other personal goals.
- The Judge may make a formal decision about your milestone advancement based on input from the VTC team.

SANCTION HEARINGS

Sanction hearings are scheduled if there is an allegation that you have violated the program's rules or failed to meet the requirements of your treatment plan. Sanction hearings are not meant to be punitive but rather to help you get back on track. The goal is to address the issue, learn from it, and move forward in a positive direction.

During a sanction hearing:

- The court will review the details of the violation and discuss the reasons behind it.
- You will have the opportunity to explain your side of the story or provide context for any challenges you faced, with support from your defense attorney.
- The judge may impose sanctions. Sanctions are intended to make the problem behavior less likely to occur again in the future.

GRADUATION HEARINGS

Graduation from the VTC is a significant accomplishment and marks the beginning of a new chapter in your life, free from the formal structure of the court but with continued support available through aftercare services. Your graduation hearing is the final hearing you will attend when you have successfully completed all phases of the Veterans Treatment Court program. This hearing is a celebration of your hard work, dedication, and accomplishments throughout the program.

During a graduation hearing:

- The judge will formally recognize your completion of the program.
- You may be invited to share your experiences and reflections on your journey.
- The court and VTC team will celebrate your achievements, and you may receive a certificate of completion.
- Your family and friends may also attend to celebrate this important milestone with you.

EXPECTATIONS DURING COURT HEARINGS

ATTENDANCE

You are required to attend all court sessions for your phase in VTC. You are expected to be on time for court, in the court room, ready for court to start on Wednesdays at 12:00 pm. If you are going to be late to court, or if you think you may become late for any reason, please contact your CSO or the court coordinator immediately after you realize you will be late, and leave a message with your name, the reason for your call, and when you expect to arrive.

Please allow enough time to be able to pass through security, so you are not late for your scheduled court appearance. Being late to court may result in sanction regardless of the reason given for being late.

To request any changes to your plan for attending court such as zoom attendance, being moved to the end of the docket, or meeting at an alternate time, please communicate with members of the VTC team prior to the hearing. Those requests should be rare, a last resort, and requested as far as possible in advance.

CLOTHING

There is no specific dress code for VTC. It is appropriate to wear clean, well-kept clothing. Work uniforms of any kind are appropriate, especially as many individuals are coming from work to court. Please avoid wearing sleeveless shirts, flip flops/sandals, or clothing with offensive logos, sayings, or references to drugs and alcohol.

BEHAVIOR

You should always maintain polite and courteous behavior. Court staff and VA staff will not tolerate verbally or physically aggressive or intimidating behavior. It is appropriate to address the Veterans' Court Judge as "Judge" or "Your Honor" during court proceedings. Failure to maintain appropriate behavior could result in court sanctions (i.e. arrest for "contempt of court") or removal from the courtroom. Continuous failure to maintain appropriate behavior could result in your dismissal from the VTC program.

INCENTIVES, SANCTIONS, AND THERAPEUTIC ADJUSTMENTS

VTC is designed to help you learn new habits that support your mental health and addiction recovery. To shape these behaviors, the VTC will use Incentives, Sanctions, Learning Activities, and Therapeutic Adjustments. We do this to help you succeed in VTC. Incentives and sanctions are at the discretion of the VTC Judge, with input from the team.

WHAT ARE INCENTIVES?

VTC is built on the idea of behavioral change. Changing our behaviors is very hard to do. To get a new behavior to stick, we all benefit from positive things that help make the new behavior more appealing. Some incentives might be applause, praise, reduced restrictions, or reduced community service time. To help celebrate the changes you are making we have a few structured incentives.

Perfect Compliance List: Participants with perfect compliance for the week will be listed during court. They will be called first when possible and will be able to leave early when possible.

MOTO Award: When a participant shows enthusiasm, dedication, and camaraderie in their engagement with VTC, the judge may present the MOTO award during the 4th week of court.

RAOK Award: When a participant goes above and beyond to offer support or kindness to another participant the judge may decide to present them the ROAK Award during the 4th week of court.

WHAT ARE SANCTIONS?

The VTC will use graduated sanctions when appropriate to allow for an immediate response to undesirable behaviors. All immediate sanctions will be discussed at the next VTC appearance. The Court may order additional sanctions to undesirable behaviors which have been addressed by a graduated response. Sanctions range from verbal reprimand to jail time. Sanctions should make unwanted behavior unlikely to occur again, so sanctions must be specific to each person and circumstance.

WHAT ARE LEARNING ACTIVITIES?

When an ineffective behavior indicates a skills deficit, the appropriate intervention from the court is to encourage skills acquisition through learning interventions. Examples of learning interventions may include:

- Writing an essay

- Recording a video sharing responses to a prompt
- Accessing the self-help center
- Attending a class, seminar, or other learning event
- Consultation services

WHAT ARE THERAPUTIC ADJUSTMENTS?

Punitive sanctions are not imposed for otherwise compliant participants who are not responding to treatment interventions. Where a participant is not responding to treatment interventions, the Court may adjust the treatment plan or level of care based on professional recommendations.

PROGRAM TERMINATION

If a participant fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the VTC program, any motion to discharge the participant from the program will be heard by the VTC judge. If the decision is made to discharge the participant from the program, the case will be returned to the original division and a sentencing hearing scheduled. The final disposition of the case will then rest with the originating judge. The following section gives examples of potential reasons for termination but does not include all circumstances for termination. The final decision on termination is up to the VTC judge.

REASONS FOR PROGRAM TERMINATION

REPEATED NON-COMPLIANCE WITH PROGRAM RULES:

Participants are required to comply with the rules of the program, including attending court hearings, treatment sessions, CSO and/or VJO meetings, and submitting to drug testing. Consistent failure to meet these obligations may result in termination. Non-compliance can include:

- Frequent missed court appearances or treatment sessions without valid reasons.
- Repeated dishonesty about drug and alcohol test results, tampering with drug tests, or refusing to submit to drug testing.
- Failing to follow through with the recommendations of the VTC team, such as not engaging in treatment or counseling services.

NEW CRIMINAL ACTIVITY:

While enrolled in VTC, participants must remain law-abiding and work to avoid any further legal issues. Engaging in new criminal behavior, especially criminal activity that poses a danger to others or violates the terms of the program, can lead to termination.

DISHONESTY OR MISREPRESENTATION:

Trust and honesty are essential in the VTC program. Participants are expected to be truthful with the court, their treatment providers, and the VTC team. Any dishonesty or attempts to mislead the court, such as lying, falsifying information, or hiding non-compliance, can be grounds for termination.

BEHAVIOR THAT THREATENS THE SAFETY OF OTHERS:

The safety and well-being of other individuals involved in the program are of paramount importance. If a participant's behavior threatens the safety of their children, family members, or others, termination may be necessary. This includes situations where the participant engages in violent or dangerous behavior, either inside or outside the program.

REFUSAL TO ENGAGE IN TREATMENT:

Active engagement in treatment is a core requirement of VTC. Participants who refuse to engage in or repeatedly drop out of required treatment programs may be subject to termination. Lack of engagement can include:

- Failing to attend counseling or therapy sessions.
- Refusing to participate in substance use treatment or mental health services.
- Repeated dismissal from treatment programs when rule compliance is achievable.
- Dropping out of treatment programs without approval from the court or treatment provider.

THE PROCESS FOR PROGRAM TERMINATION

Program termination is not an immediate or arbitrary decision. It involves a series of steps and opportunities for the participant to correct their behavior. The VTC team will work closely with participants to address issues before termination is considered. The following outlines the process leading to potential termination.

IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES:

If the court identifies concerns about your progress, compliance, or behavior, these issues will be discussed during status or sanction hearings. The VTC team will provide feedback and offer guidance on how to address the concerns.

SANCTIONS AND THERAPEUTIC ADJUSTMENTS

Before termination is considered, the court will likely impose sanctions or therapeutic adjustments to help you correct your behavior. Sanctions may include increased

monitoring, assignments, or restrictions. Therapeutic adjustments may include changes to your treatment plan to better meet your needs.

WARNINGS AND FINAL OPPORTUNITY:

If the problem continues, the court will issue formal warnings about the possibility of termination. You will be given the opportunity to explain any challenges or obstacles you are facing and may be offered additional resources or support to help you get back on track. The court will make it clear that continued non-compliance could lead to termination.

TERMINATION HEARING:

If the participant continues to violate the program's rules or fails to make progress, the court may schedule a termination hearing. During this hearing, the judge will review your case, including any past non-compliances, progress reports, and recommendations from the VTC team. You, with your attorney, will have the opportunity to speak on your behalf and explain your circumstances.

JUDGE'S DECISION

After the termination hearing, the judge will make the final decision on whether to terminate your participation in the VTC program. If you are terminated from the VTC, the court will explain the reasons for the termination and what will happen next.

VOLUNTARY TERMINATION

Participants may voluntarily withdraw from VTC. If you choose to withdraw, you must submit a formal request to the court explaining your decision through your attorney. Be aware that withdrawing from the program may result in consequences like those associated with involuntary termination, including legal repercussions.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER PROGRAM TERMINATION?

Following termination from VTC, the case is returned to the court setting where it started. You will be assigned a new attorney, and a new ADA will be assigned. Information about your VTC services will not be shared with the assigned judge, ADA, or defense attorney by VTC.

While program termination is a setback, it does not mean that you have lost the opportunity to improve your situation. The court may still provide you with resources to support your recovery and well-being, even after termination.

The goal of VTC is to support your recovery and help you succeed. Program termination is a last resort and only happens when all other options have been exhausted. The VTC team is committed to working with you to overcome challenges.

By staying engaged, communicating openly, and following your treatment plan, you can avoid the possibility of termination and continue progressing toward your goals.

APPEALING A TERMINATION DECISION

In some cases, participants may have the right to appeal a termination decision if they believe the termination was unjust or based on incorrect information. If you wish to appeal the court's decision, you should consult with your attorney to discuss the legal process and your options.

SECOND OR SUBSEQUENT OPPORTUNITIES IN VETERANS TREATMENT COURT

Former Veterans Treatment Court participants may be eligible to receive another opportunity to participate in the Veterans Treatment Court on a case-by-case basis. Consideration for readmission would follow the application process and may require additional information at the request of the VTC team.

GRADUATION

CRITERIA FOR GRADUATION

The program is designed to be completed in about 18 months. When you have made significant progress toward your treatment plan goals, and meet all the milestone requirements, you will become eligible to graduate from the Seventh Judicial District of Kansas Veterans Treatment Court.

You must submit a graduation application to the VTC Team at least 30 days before your anticipated graduation date. If the VTC Team agrees that you have met the graduation requirements, you will be approved to graduate. Upon successful completion of VTC, the VTC Judge will be responsible for final disposition of the case.

GRADUATION CEREMONY

Graduating from the VTC is important and cause for celebration. We will hold graduation ceremonies for all participants who complete requirements quarterly. Graduates may say a few words, invite family and supportive people, and will receive a graduation certificate from the judge.

VTC GRADUATES

After graduation, you will be given an opportunity to share feedback with the program coordinator about your experience in VTC. We want to know how we can do better, and what is working well.

VTC staff will check in with you, and track your progress at 6, 12, and 18 months after graduation. We will track any police contact, and we will also attempt to reach out to you to see how things are going. Before you graduate, we will work to create a plan for ongoing success, and we will ask you about your progress on that plan.

VTC participants are welcome to volunteer as mentors. To qualify as a mentor, you must have remained in recovery for a minimum of two years after graduation.

ASKING FOR HELP

ASKING FOR HELP IS STRENGTH

No one expects you to have everything figured out. Asking for help is not a sign of failure, it's a sign of growth, self-awareness, and determination to succeed. The VTC team is here to support you every step of the way, and by reaching out when you need help, you're taking an important step toward building a better future.

HERE ARE SOME STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO ASK FOR HELP:

Talk to Your Court Service Officer: Your CSO is here to listen, provide guidance, and connect you with the resource. Whether you're facing a big issue or a small challenge, your CSO can help.

Reach Out to Your Treatment Providers: If you're struggling with your recovery or mental health, let your treatment providers know. They can adjust your treatment plan, provide additional support, or suggest new strategies to help you succeed.

Speak Up in Court: During your court hearings, you will have the opportunity to talk to the judge about your progress and any challenges you're facing. Don't be afraid to speak up and ask for help. The court is there to support you, and your honesty will be met with understanding.

Talk to Your Peers: Sometimes, the people who can help you the most are those who are going through the same things. Your fellow participants in the VTC program understand the struggles of recovery and parenting, and they can provide support and encouragement when you need it.

VTC Participant Handbook

I acknowledge that I have received and read the contents and rules of the Douglas county Veteran's Treatment Court Participant handbook.

Participant signature _____ **Date** _____

Witness signature _____ **Date** _____