

Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HB 7023 — Veterans Treatment Court Programs

by Judiciary Committee; Criminal Justice and Public Safety Subcommittee; and Representative Byrd and others (CS/CS/SB 764 by Criminal Justice Committee; Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee; and Senator Burgess)

This bill redesignates the Military Veterans and Servicemembers Programs as the Veterans Treatment Court Program. The bill authorizes courts to develop and operate a veterans treatment court with an emphasis on employing a nonadversarial approach to resolving an underlying cause of behavior. An underlying cause of behavior is a service-related mental illness, traumatic brain injury, substance use disorder, psychological problem, or military sexual trauma.

Like existing law, the program is open to a servicemember, veteran, and a current or former defense contractor or military member of a foreign allied country. However, the bill expands participation to include a member of Space Force.

The state attorney, in consultation with the court, will decide whether to admit a defendant into the program. Unlike the current program which is open to all veterans regardless of discharge status, the chief judge and state attorney of each circuit jointly decide whether to admit dishonorably discharged veterans.

The bill encourages the court to develop policies and procedures, including employing a nonadversarial approach; identifying participants early in the process; and engaging in partnerships among other veterans treatment courts, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, public agencies, and community-based organizations.

A Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program in operation as of June 30, 2021, is grandfathered in to continue as a Veterans Treatment Court Program but must comply with changes made under this bill.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2021.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 117-0