



[SF 2287](#) – Veterans Treatment Courts (LSB6093SV)
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Fiscal Note Version – New

Description

[Senate File 2287](#) establishes a Veterans Treatment Court in each judicial district to serve veterans and to integrate court sanctions and incentives with substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and transitional services.

The Bill provides that the jurisdiction of the Veterans Treatment Court may be exercised by any district judge and by any district associate judge who is designated by the chief judge of a judicial district as a judge of the Veterans Treatment Court. The chief judge of a district may designate a Veterans Treatment Court judge to preside in more than one county.

Background

Currently, the State of Iowa has one Veterans Treatment Court which operates in the 3rd Judicial District (Woodbury County). From FY 2015 to FY 2019, there have been 27 participants in the Veterans Court. Of the 27 participants, 17 have completed the programming.

In FY 2019, there were 194 individuals who were admitted to prison on a most serious class B, C, or D felony or aggravated misdemeanor offense who are currently or were formerly a member of the military. The average length of stay for participants who completed programming was 637 days. The cost to the Department of Corrections (DOC) for those currently participating in the 3rd District Veterans Court, as well as those who have closed programming within the last five fiscal years is approximately \$380,000.

Assumptions

Judicial Branch

- Requirements to monitor and measure participant progress will necessitate creation of a special module to record, access, and utilize relevant court events, treatment, testing, and progress data. A data collection module would be designed to reside on existing Judicial Branch equipment.
- Initial and ongoing training expenses for Veterans Court personnel would include travel, materials, training fees, and other similar expenses.
- One day per week of judge time (1/5 of available time of one judge) will be required in the 5th and 6th Districts, and one day per two weeks of judge time (1/10 of available time of one judge) will be required in other districts. The analysis assumes that district court judges will be assigned to these courts.
- Each Veterans Treatment Court would require one full-time coordinator.

Department of Corrections

- The average marginal daily cost for Veterans Court is \$22.07, which is the current marginal cost to operate drug courts.
- The average length of stay in prison for Class D felons is estimated at 371 days, and 210 days for an aggravated misdemeanor. The average length of stay for Veterans Court is

estimated at approximately 637 days. This assumption is based on the current average length of stay in the 3rd District Veterans Court.

State Public Defender

- The cost of an attorney to represent a veteran will be approximately the same as the cost of a contract attorney in the existing drug and mental health courts.
- On average, the State Public Defender spends \$1,798 per month on each drug court, or \$21,576 per year for each of these drug and mental health courts. It is assumed that the total cost will be \$21,576 per district.
- Veterans courts will meet on average at approximately the same frequency of the existing drug and mental health specialty courts.

Fiscal Impact

Judicial Branch

[Senate File 2287](#) would increase the cost of the Judicial Branch operating budget. **Table 1** provides the estimated ongoing and annual cost increases to the Judicial Branch to operate the Veterans Treatment Court.

Table 1 — One-time and Annual Costs of Veterans Court

| Required Costs | First Year | Second Year and After |
|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Consultant fees | \$ 85,000 | \$ 0 |
| Initial Training | 16,000 | 0 |
| Data Module | 100,000 | 0 |
| Ongoing Training | 0 | 16,000 |
| Treatment Court Coordinators | 650,000 | 650,000 |
| Judge Time | 228,000 | 228,000 |
| Total | \$ 1,079,000 | \$ 894,000 |

The Judicial Branch estimates it will need to hire a consultant to develop an operational plan and policies for the court. The Judicial Branch would need to hire eight Veterans Treatment Court coordinators. The compensation for the skills, training, and experience required would likely be equivalent to the cost of a Juvenile Court Officer 2 position, at a total cost of approximately \$82,000.

Department of Corrections

[Senate File 2287](#) is estimated to increase the annual operating cost of the DOC by approximately \$590,000. There are currently 84 individuals who were admitted to prison, who may be eligible for a Veterans Court under this Bill. Although the marginal daily cost of prison and Veterans Court are similar in cost, those who are supervised in Veterans Court will be under supervision for longer periods. As a result, Veterans Court has a higher total cost than the cost of prison. **Table 2** provides the cost estimate information for the DOC.

Table 2 — Annual Cost Increase — Prison versus Veterans Courts

| | Annual Operating Cost |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Veterans Court - SF 2287 | \$ 1,180,922 |
| Prison - Current Law | 592,230 |
| Total Cost Increase | \$ 588,692 |

Based on the experience of the 3rd District Veterans Court, most of the prison admissions eligible for Veterans Court would be those serving the most serious offenses for Class D felony or lower.

State Public Defender

[Senate File 2287](#) is estimated to have a fiscal impact to the Indigent Defense Fund. Based on the current cost of representation for drug court cases, it is estimated that the Bill would result in an additional annual cost of approximately \$173,000 to the Indigent Defense Fund.

Summary

Table 3 provides a fiscal impact summary of [SF 2287](#). [Senate File 2287](#) is estimated to result in a total cost increase of \$1.7 million annually beginning in the second year after implementation.

Table 3 — Current Costs and Proposed Operating Costs of Statewide Veterans Courts

| | Current Law | First Year | Second Year and After | Annual Operating Cost Difference |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Judicial Branch | \$ 0 | \$1,079,000 | \$ 894,000 | \$ 894,000 |
| DOC | 592,000 | 1,181,000 | 1,181,000 | \$ 589,000 |
| Indigent Defense Fund | 0 | 173,000 | 173,000 | \$ 173,000 |
| Total | \$ 592,000 | \$2,433,000 | \$ 2,248,000 | \$ 1,656,000 |

*Note - Current Law DOC cost reflects the marginal cost of prison for eligible candidates

Sources

Judicial Branch
 Department of Corrections
 Office of the State Public Defender

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The fiscal note for this Bill was prepared pursuant to [Joint Rule 17](#) and the Iowa Code. Data used in developing this fiscal note is available from the Fiscal Services Division of the Legislative Services Agency upon request.