



**SAN MATEO COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT**  
400 County Center  
Redwood City, CA 94063

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **San Mateo County Superior Court Veteran Support**

**REDWOOD CITY** – Over the course of three days, the Honorable Michael K. Wendler, Veterans Treatment Court and Military Diversion Judge, and the San Mateo County Collaborative Courts team participated in a series of important events focusing on the support, care, recovery, and celebration of veterans. During the week that the world commemorated the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the San Mateo County Superior Court affirmed its commitment to serving the veteran community.

Beginning on June 5, Judge Wendler and Collaborative Courts staff joined justice partners from the San Mateo County DA's Office and Private Defender Program (PDP) for educational tours of VA Palo Alto facilities, led by VA Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist Leah White. The day started out with a tour of the Domiciliary on the VA Palo Alto's Menlo Park campus. The Domiciliary is a residential treatment program offering temporary living assistance to veterans until permanent, long-term housing solutions can be provided. The group then received a comprehensive overview of the Trauma Recovery Program and its intensive residential program, as well as the Compensated Work Program, which connects veterans with psychosocial concerns to vocational rehabilitation services. The tour later transitioned to the main VA campus in Palo Alto. The group learned about innovative therapy programs offered by the Addiction Consultation and Treatment team while touring a residential substance use and mental health facility. The group then experienced state-of-the-art facilities providing polytrauma and blind rehabilitation, as well as the research center treating spinal cord injuries. Attendees were shown one of the two Fisher Houses and the Defender's Lodge, both offering housing support for veterans receiving intensive medical care and their families. The day also included meeting both human and canine team members with Warrior Canine Connection. Warrior Canine Connection utilizes special service dogs paired with its mission-based trauma recovery model to help veterans reconnect with life, their families, and each other.

The following day, on June 6, the 12th annual Veterans Court Picnic was held at Red Morton Park in Redwood City. Since 2012, the Veterans Court Picnic has provided an opportunity to celebrate and provide encouragement to veteran clients participating in the Veterans Treatment Court and Military Diversion programs. The picnic is coordinated in partnership with Collaborative Courts staff, San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS), the PDP, and San Mateo County Probation, with the Substance Abuse Focus Grant providing the primary funding for the event. San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe and representatives from the DA's Office also attended the picnic and provided support. Lunch was catered by Catering Connection, a program from San Mateo County Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) that employs residents with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

Judge Wendler, Assistant Deputy Chief Probation Officer Ondray Cooper, BHRS Mental Health Specialty Courts Supervisor Angel Nguyen, Deputy Court Executive Officer Sarah Lind, and Collaborative Courts staff served veterans on the chow line. After lunch, and some rounds of bocce, Judge Wendler and Collaborative Courts Management Analyst Sean Noland led a special awards ceremony recognizing 18 veterans in Veterans Treatment Court and Military Diversion. Each justice partner agency involved in the programs nominated veterans based on their progress, growth, effort, and character. Veterans received a \$100 gift card and an award in a special category recognizing their personal stories and contributions, including the “Overcoming Adversity” award, the “Best Start” award, and even the “Best Zoom Background” award. All veterans who attended were given special gift bags assembled by attorney Melissa McKowan. Judge Wendler, also a veteran, shared his passion and commitment to helping and supporting veterans, highlighting, “It’s an honor to serve you and help you get back on track, because that’s what we owe you.” Veterans Treatment Court and Military Diversion currently have 43 combined active veteran clients, with over 100 veterans having successfully completed the programs.

Finally, on June 7, the Collaborative Courts team participated in the Veteran Stand Down event, hosted by the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) and Veterans Services Office (VSO). Held at the San Mateo Elks Lodge, almost 60 government agencies, non-profits, and community groups, including VA Health Care, the American Red Cross, Swords to Plowshares, Second Harvest Food Bank, and Dignity on Wheels, offered services and assistance to the nearly 150 veterans in attendance. Judge Wendler and the Honorable Susan M. Jakubowski, who serves as the Collaborative Courts Supervising Judge, along with Collaborative Courts staff and attorneys with the PDP, the San Mateo County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS), and the San Mateo County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator, partnered to offer on-site legal services. The volunteer attorneys with the PDP offered veterans bench warrant assistance for outstanding felonies and misdemeanors, help with signing waivers to clear traffic fines and fees, as well as post-conviction relief for sealing and expunging court records. Later in June, Judge Wendler will hold a special court calendar to clear the outstanding warrants, and the Honorable Donald J. Ayoob, who served as the former Collaborative Courts Supervising Judge, will hold a special court calendar to clear the outstanding traffic balances. The two court staff attorneys with the Family Law Facilitator provided important self-help to veterans with pending family law cases. The Family Law Facilitator’s Assistant Supervising Attorney Richard Miyasaki noted, “It was incredibly rewarding to be able to bring our services to help those who served our country,” adding, “It is our hope that by bringing the Family Law Facilitator to this group, it will make it easier for them to connect with our services in the future.” There was also a joint effort to ensure that all veterans filled out MIL-100 forms. This simple, yet significant document permanently records a veteran’s status in the court system for all current and future legal proceedings. Over 50 veterans sought legal services at the Veteran Stand Down event, with nearly 30 veterans receiving direct on-site legal assistance that day.

The San Mateo County Superior Court is committed to serving all veterans and ensuring they receive the necessary treatment and support they deserve. These impactful events were made possible by the incredible working relationships with the Court’s justice partner agencies, with special thanks to BHRS, the PDP, the DA’s Office, Probation, DCSS, the VSO, the HSA, VRS, and VA Veterans Justice Outreach.

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**VA Palo Alto tours** (Courtesy, VA Palo Alto Health Care System)



**Veterans Court Picnic** (Courtesy, Dan Radovich/San Mateo County Superior Court)



**Veterans Court Picnic** (Courtesy, Dan Radovich/San Mateo County Superior Court)



**Veteran Stand Down** (Courtesy, Dan Radovich/San Mateo County Superior Court)



**Veteran Stand Down** (Courtesy, Dan Radovich/San Mateo County Superior Court)



**Veteran Stand Down** (Courtesy, Bryan Kingston/San Mateo County Human Services Agency)