

**Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs**  
**Hearing on "Programs for Justice-Involved Veterans"**

*April 15, 2026*

*Testimony by*

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Chair Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Corey Schramm. I am a husband, a father of two great kids, and a proud veteran of the United States Army. Today, I serve as an adult case manager at the Johnson County Mental Health Center and a member of the Johnson County Criminal Justice Advisory Council.

I am also a grateful graduate of the Johnson County Veterans Treatment Court.

Growing up in Kansas, serving in the military was not just a goal; it was a family tradition. After 9/11, I joined the Army and was soon at Fort Hood, Texas, for my first assignment. Within a few months, I departed for my first deployment to Iraq. I am proud of my service. My battery was hand-selected to fight alongside Marines in Fallujah, and I stayed with the same platoon through all three of my deployments.

I got married after my first deployment. Shortly after my daughter was born, I deployed again. Leaving my family was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

In many ways, coming home was even harder.

In Iraq, we had structure and routine; someone was telling us where to be at all times. We knew we had each other's backs, and the mission kept us focused. Back home, I was still learning how to be a husband and a father. Just when I felt I was beginning to build a relationship with my daughter, I would have to leave again. After my final deployment, I tried to adjust to being home, but without the structure of the military, I drifted. I understand now that my drinking and drug use was my way of coping with a life I didn't know how to live.

I was on and off probation a few times, but in June of 2020, things came to a breaking point. I spent five hours in a destructive episode at my house, involving a weapon. I have no memory of the incident, but I woke up charged with a felony and facing incarceration. I didn't know if I would ever be welcomed back in my home again.

For too many veterans, this is where the story ends. But I was fortunate to meet a Veterans Justice Outreach specialist with the VA who introduced me to veterans treatment court. It changed my life and the lives of my wife and children.

I didn't walk into veterans treatment court ready for change. I was angry, and I didn't know who I could trust. But my first day in veterans treatment court happened to be a graduation ceremony. I watched veterans with backgrounds just like mine hug the judge and thank the police officers who arrested them. The graduates were applauded and thanked for their service. It was like nothing I had ever seen before.

The structure I received in veterans treatment court felt comfortable. Like in the military, I knew where I needed to be and what was expected of me. It held me accountable. I felt like part of a unit again.

Through a combination of community-based services and VA care, including treatment and group therapy, I started to see a future for myself and my family. The veterans treatment court team was with me every step of the way. When I needed more support, they were there to provide it. When I stumbled, they held me accountable.

One of the most important parts of veterans treatment court was my mentor, Navy veteran, Rear Admiral Ed Phillips (ret.). He was by my side every step of the way and showed me what recovery could look like.

During the program, I was able to access vocational rehabilitation through the VA to go back to school and get an associate's degree in addiction counseling. I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my daughter doing our homework together. It was one of the small moments that helped us rebuild our relationship. This year, my wife and I will celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and take our daughter to college at Kansas State University; my son and I are about to attend our sixth NASCAR race at KS Speedway.

When I graduated from veterans treatment court, I was proud but also nervous about losing the structure that had helped me rebuild my life. But the program prepared me for this challenge.

Today, I often return to veterans treatment court to speak to participants and graduates. I do it for the new veteran in the program who might hear my story and know that they can make it through. I'm sharing my story today because I know there are countless veterans out there who are unable to receive the same opportunity I did, because a veterans treatment court is not available to them. My hope is that today's hearing can help change that.

Veterans treatment courts are not a shortcut through the justice system. These programs are rigorous. They demand honesty, discipline, and a willingness to change. But they work.

As you consider the future of veterans treatment courts, I urge you to continue supporting and expanding these programs. Because behind every statistic is a veteran like me; someone who served, who struggled, and who, with the right combination of accountability and support, can find their way back.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story. I look forward to your questions.