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Ladies and Gentleman of the Committee,

I have been asked to speak here before you on my experience with Philadelphia Veterans Court. Let me first say that upon receiving an email asking me of my interest in appearing before you my first thoughts were that I'd be delighted to try and help in any way I could. However after replying to the email and talking on the phone with Mr. Kane I think reality set in and I had to ask myself "What have you done now! What could you possibly have to say to these distinguished people?" In truth, it's really very simple, what I've gotten from my experience with Veterans Court is a profound Hope! Now expressing this to you in a way that may benefit others is the challenge I see set before me.

In talking with Mr. Kane I believe it best to start with what brought me to Veterans Court in the first place. Basically it was my long term struggle with addiction. Today I'm aware of the some of the events that played a part in my "self medication". Besides the turmoil and "drug culture" of the sixties and early seventies I enlisted in the Navy at age seventeen. Becoming a Navy Diver my duties at times exposed me to what all I can say at this time were traumatic events. I now know that how I dealt with this is by suppressing my emotions at the time thereby creating a struggle within myself. A struggle that at different periods in my life I sought help through various treatment programs and also twelve step groups. Several times I was able to attain a few years abstinence but always I would end up relapsing.

I believe it was in March of 2004 that I was first introduced to VA medical where I went to SATU (substance abuse treatment unit) at VA Medical, Coatesville, PA. At this time in my life I was homeless as in other times, homelessness being one aspect of addiction. From SATU one could go into a domiciliary program for homeless Veterans, this program being geared towards teaching job search skills along with further addiction recovery groups. It was at Coatesville that I first became aware of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Honestly at first I believed it to be some scam that vets were using in an attempt to get paid by the government. However I would attend a separate 12 step group for PTSD facilitated by now, my good friend Rabbi Phillip Goodman. This group was not a part of the Doms program but available to all that were interested in seeking help. Rabbi Phil would also take time himself and counsel me as would my own catholic chaplain.

I had long known that addiction is really a symptom of some underlying cause and was beginning to believe that maybe in fact psychiatry understood what mine might be in PTSD. I found out that the VA offers treatment in this area at Coatesville and other facilities thought out the country. I put in a request for help through the Dom treatment team for the program in New York. I was turned down and I remember being told by the administrator of the Dom "Brian I believe you have PTSD, but we believe it best you stay here." I felt betrayed and equated their solution as to putting a band aid on a wound requiring sutures. Needless to say I left Coatesville and returned to Philadelphia to do things my own way.

I was still homeless and lived on the streets and would go to a non-profit organization, the Philadelphia Veterans Multi- Service and Education Center (www.philavets.org) during the day. At that time VA Medical rented space from them on the second floor and I could see a therapist and attend recovery groups. The third floor is called the Perimeter and is a day center for homeless vets, the fourth floor has computer education and job counselors for out of work Vets. My "sobriety" was precarious at best. I would make half hearted attempts but never anything more than a few weeks.

Ladies and gentlemen to make a long story short my addiction to illegal drugs graced me with the opportunity to get room and board at the Philadelphia Prison System at State road in Philly to await trial on a possessions charge. During one appearance at regular court I remember my lawyer talking to the judge about some

program that had a long waiting list. Now, with the time I had already spent in jail, I don't think that if I was sentenced I would have done but maybe an additional two months. It was at this hearing that the bailiff had a word with the judge, and his honor then stated that he was transferring my case to Veterans Court.

I went back to PPS where for me the strangest thing happened, I received a visit from Rebecca Hicks of the Philadelphia VA Medical who was to be my liaison to Veterans Court. Now addiction and PTSD have one thing in common and that is Isolation. Having someone to show up at jail telling me they were there to assist me in my court appearances was quite a shock to me. I still remember my first appearance in front of Judge Dugan and him asking me how I liked jail. I could only tell him truthfully that they were treating me better than I had been treating myself. He had me released from PPS on the condition of court supervision and VA direction. Through the help of Ms. Hicks I have gotten help for both my addiction and my PTSD.

There is one incident of great importance I would like to relay to you concerning one of my "court visits". I remember awaiting my turn to be called and seeing this one young man who had what I call a "don't give a damn" attitude all about him, something of which I'm well acquainted. I knew by his age he was a vet of one of our most recent "conflicts" either Iraq or Afghanistan. I could tell by the conversation going on in front of the bench that this young man was in "hot water" with the judge for missing appointments or something or another. Experience told me judges don't tolerate 'bad attitudes', and then the strangest thing happened, there was a recess or what I thought to be a recess. When court resumed I realized Judge Dugan had taken this young man back maybe to his chambers, and had a talk to him. I don't think it was a scolding but a "one Vet to another" talk because this young man's whole demeanor had changed and became positive.

At PVMSEC the motto is "Serving those who served". Here it was, in action, in city government! Also for me personally Veterans Court allowed me the freedom to take responsibility for my actions and my own recovery!

Ladies and gentleman of this esteemed committee today I not only volunteer in the computer classes at PVMSEC, I attend weekly meetings of a group named Adeodtus, a spiritual support group for ex-inmates. In this group we are starting to

explore a program about restorative justice. I told them if they want to see restorative justice in action visit Philadelphia Veterans Court!!!

Ladies and gentleman I'm not an educated man, I think of the nickname of our great state, the Keystone State, I never really understood this until my experience with the law. To me, of the three branches of government, Executive, Legislative and Judicial, it is the judiciary that is the "Keystone". It is this branch that makes the others work!

Ladies and gentleman today I maintain a modest room one block away from Independence Hall. On the corner of my block is where Thomas Jefferson penned the greatest document to date. This Sunday our "Commander in Chief" will honor, in a field in western Pennsylvania, men and women who were our "first combatants" in our ongoing struggle for freedom. May your work here today continue to bring hope to Veterans in their personnel struggles.

Thank you for the honor and privilege of appearing before you today.