

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

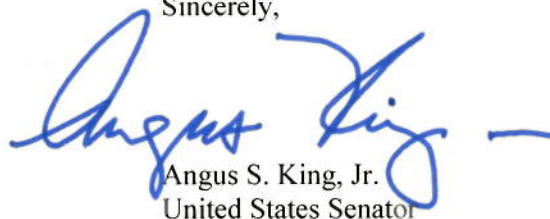
I am writing in support of the Veterans Justice Program and to highlight current resource inadequacies facing the program in the State of Maine. I urge you to fund an additional Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Specialist and a VJO Re-entry Specialist to better serve the needs of Maine veterans who so selflessly served this country.

As you are aware, Maine has one of the highest number of veterans per capita, and our rural veterans face unique challenges in gaining access to VA health care and services related to mental health, substance abuse and homelessness. The Veterans Justice Program provides critical support to veterans involved in the criminal justice system, and the program has shown a high success rate in helping veterans with mental health and substance abuse issues gain access to their entitled VA health care and services. Recent studies suggest that Veterans Treatment Courts are effective in reducing recidivism amongst participants, with recidivism rates in the one year period after the program at less than 10 percent. By way of comparison, this figure is well below the overall one-year recidivism rate, which the 2013 Maine Adult Recidivism Report identifies as between 21 and 26 percent in the state. I applaud these gains and support the program's community approach, which engages veterans, the VA, law enforcement officials and courts. Together, we can help these veterans and better serve those who answered the call to serve.

While I commend this program and the effort of staff on the ground—with only one VJO Specialist responsible for the entire state—more resources need to be allocated to this program in Maine. Additionally, a VJO Re-entry Specialist position, which provides critical case work to veterans returning to society at large, was vacated in 2009. The position has since remained unfunded and unfilled. As such, I urge you to consider providing funding for an additional VJO Specialist and to renew funding for a VJO re-entry specialist.

With these additional staff members, the Veterans Justice Program in Maine would be able to better serve the needs of veterans across the state by facilitating access to health care, mental health treatment, substance abuse counseling and homelessness services.

Sincerely,



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator