

TEXAS COMMISSION ON JAIL STANDARDS


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MEMORANDUM

TO: Sheriffs and Jail Administrators

FROM: Brandon Wood, Executive Director 

RE: VRSS FAQ

DATE: April 7, 2016

House Bill (HB) 875 requires all Texas county jails to utilize the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS) or a similar service to find and identify veterans. At this point, all jails should be utilizing the VRSS. Below is an FAQ regarding the VRSS that may help answer questions.

What is the VRSS?

The Veteran Reentry Search Service is a web application developed by the VA to identify Veterans who are currently incarcerated in federal, state, city and county correctional facilities, or who are litigants in the court system.

Why did the VA create the VRSS?

Eligible men and women, who have served our county, may be missing the opportunity to access care and services. Once veterans are identified, they may be eligible to receive a full spectrum of services. Unlike other federal programs, Veterans do not lose their Federal benefits until 60 days **after conviction**.

How does the VRSS work?

A jail, prison, or court can upload their inmate roster, in a Comma Separated Value (CSV) format, and the VRSS will then compare the data with the VA-DOD Identify Repository (VADIR). VADIR contains the records of all United States military service men and women. The VRSS will then post an electronic listing of Prisoner ID numbers of persons identified as having previous military service at the facility's VRSS account. The jail can then retrieve the listing of persons identified as veterans.

Does anyone else get my county's list of veterans?

Yes, the VA created the Veterans Justice Program (VJP) specifically for finding justice-involved veterans. Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) are social workers and case managers that can provide direct outreach,

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Mission Statement

To empower local government to provide safe, secure and suitable local jail facilities through proper rules and procedures while promoting innovative programs and ideas. The Commission on Jail Standards welcomes all suggestions and will promptly respond to all complaints directed against the agency or any facilities under its purview.



assessment and case management for justice-involved Veterans in local courts and jails. The VJO for your area will receive your facility's output/return file.

What information does a VJO receive and what will they do with the information?

The VJO will receive detailed information about a justice-involved veteran in your facility including name, cell location (if the jail provides it), and SSN. Depending on the Veteran's service or eligibility, the VJO may be able to provide the following services while the veteran is incarcerated in your jail.

- Medical and mental health screening and treatment planning
- Clinical case management services
- Connection to VA's array of services and benefits for Veterans
- Pre-release assessments

Can you give an example of how the VRSS/VJO program may work?

A Vietnam Veteran was incarcerated pre-trial in a Texas county jail for a DWI-felony. This inmate attempted suicide, but an alert jailer was able to stop him. The inmate had refused his breakfast tray and newspaper. The jailer knew that the inmate had never refused his newspaper before and went back to check on him. The officer caught him in the act of hanging himself. A few weeks later, the VJO was able to secure the inmate placement at a VA in-patient treatment program for substance abuse and obtained a court release to have the inmate placed in the program. After treatment, the inmate was returned to the county jail and was adjudicated on his criminal charges.

Remember, a Veteran does not lose his/her VA benefits until 60 days **after** conviction. In this case, the inmate was able to receive vital services at no cost to the county. This treatment may help rehabilitate the inmate and reduce the likelihood of returning to jail on a new charge.

Is every individual identified in the return file eligible for VA health care and benefits?

Not necessarily. Eligibility for VA health care and other benefits can only be established when a Veteran enrolls with VA for such services. VJO specialists can assist Veterans with the enrollment process, but cannot determine their eligibility for VA services.

How often are VRSS users required to upload a file?

Neither the VA nor the Commission on Jail Standards requires an upload frequency; users may upload files on a schedule they deem appropriate, given their jail facility and population. However, to gain the maximum benefit from the system, many jails upload daily. **Frequent VRSS uploads of newly booked inmates are crucial so that VJOs can make contact with Veterans in your facility before they are released.**

Do we upload our entire jail roster or only newly-booked inmates?

It would be more efficient to upload only inmates booked since the last time you uploaded a roster.



Are there any instruction manuals for the technical part of the VRSS?

Yes, the VA has a Power Point presentation and a file specification document that may help answer technical questions. The documents should be available at your VRSS log-in, or you may contact TCJS for copies.

Is there a help desk for the VRSS?

Yes, call 1-800-983-0935 for assistance.

What is the veteran referral card?

HB 875 also requires jails to assist identified veterans with applying for federal benefits. However, applying for federal benefits is a complicated process that requires specially-trained personnel to complete. To satisfy this portion of the statute, the Commission worked with the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to create a Veteran referral card.

What do we do with the card?

When a veteran is identified, simply give the veteran the card, and he or she can mail it back to the Texas Veterans Commission.

What will the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) do with the card?

Two things will happen when the TVC receives the card. Card information will be given to the TVC claims benefit department and the Texas Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN). The claims department will work to get the veteran signed up for VA benefits, and the MVPN will reach out to the veteran at your facility to provide peer-to-peer services to the incarcerated veteran.

Can we use commissary funds to pay for postage for the cards?

Absolutely, the Legislature's intent for passage of the commissary statute was for commissary proceeds to benefit inmates. Postage for the veteran referral card will directly benefit the inmate. This will help the program achieve maximum effectiveness under HB 875.

Do we have to pay for the cards? And how do we get more cards?

The printing and distribution of the Veteran referral cards are paid for by the TCJS and TVC at no cost to counties. Contact the TCJS if your facility needs more Veteran referral cards at 512-463-5505.

How do we prove that our facility is compliant with HB 875 and Jail Standards?



After you receive your return file, log the veteran's information and whether he/she received a veteran referral card. If the inmate bonded out before you received the return file, simply note that on the log. Counties are not required to submit the log to the TCJS but should have it available for inspection.

Glossary

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is a federal agency that provides services to military veterans. The VA operates the VRSS.

Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) is a state agency that acts as the state-appointed advocate of Texas veterans.

Texas Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN) connects Veterans and their families with local, state and federal resources through an active group of peer veterans. Coordinators are state employees of the Texas Veterans Commission.

Veterans Justice Program or Veterans Justice Outreach Program (VJP/VJO) is a VA program specifically created to find and provide outreach services to justice-involved veterans.