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## Committee approves alternative sentencing for veterans with PTSD

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Legislation approved by a House committee would allow veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI) to receive treatment when they are convicted of a crime

House Bill 1081, by State Rep. John Bennett (R-Sallisaw), would allow a judge to send a military veteran convicted of a crime to the Department of Veterans Affairs for treatment if the defendant was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Bennett, a Marine who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, said the PTSD or TBI would have to be service-related and have contributed to the commission of the crime.

“Many veterans are struggling to cope with PTSD and TBI, and are not seeking the treatment they need,” Bennett said. “My legislation will help them to get treatment, which I believe they have earned through their service to our country. This is not an opportunity for someone to commit a crime and blame it on PTSD. You have to be diagnosed with the condition, it has to be service-related, and it has to have played a role in the commission of the crime.”

As a private citizen, Bennett worked with Matt Stiner and State Rep. Fred Jordan (R-Jenks), all Marine veterans, to help create the state’s first veteran’s court, an alternative sentencing venue for veterans struggling with addiction due, in part, to PTSD.

He said his legislation will build on the success of that program, which has enjoyed an astounding 99 percent success rate since December 2008.

While the veteran’s court serves only those accused of misdemeanors, Bennett said the new proposed alternative sentencing program would also include those involved in some felony crimes.

“These men and women have been willing to serve and possibly die for our country,” Bennett said. “Any veteran dealing with resulting service-related PTSD or TBI should have the chance to get treatment before incarceration.”

The program could ultimately save taxpayer dollars because the alternative sentencing/treatment programs would be less expensive than automatic incarceration, Bennett noted.

House Bill 1081 passed unanimously in the House Judiciary Committee. It now awaits a vote on the floor of the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

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