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Simon Poll: Illinoisans Want Veterans in Treatment over Prison

A recent poll by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale shows over half of Illinois registered voters, 54 percent, support creating veterans' courts to offer veterans charged with crimes to have treatment options for post-traumatic stress disorder or drug and alcohol addiction instead of going to jail.

On Thursday, April 14 a bill to amend the Veterans and Service Members Court Treatment Act passed the Illinois House with 108 votes. This bill, HB5003, introduced by Rep. Christine Winger of Bloomington, now moves to the Senate.

The bill proposes changing one word in the current law that in effect would require chief judges in each judicial circuit to establish veterans court programs in their circuit instead of only authorizing them to establish these programs.

Younger voters and women supported the idea while older voters and men tended not to like it.

"Veterans' health issues are important public policy issues after 15 years of conflict around the world," said David Yepsen, director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute. "This poll indicates most Illinois voters want policy makers to give returning veterans all the help they can."

The random participants in the statewide poll of registered Illinois voters were asked: "Some say military veterans charged with crimes should be processed in so-called 'veterans' courts' that could offer post-traumatic stress treatment and substance abuse treatment instead of incarceration. Others say veterans should be processed in the same courts as everyone else. Which comes closer to your view?"

Region. Support is uniform throughout the state at just over one-half. In both the Chicago, and the Chicago suburbs including suburban Cook and the collar counties, 53 percent of voters stated that veterans should have special courts. Support is a bit higher through rural Illinois at 55 percent. Opposition to veterans' courts was 40 percent, 39 percent and 40 percent in Chicago, the Chicago suburbs, and rural Illinois, respectively.

Political Party. Democrats and Republicans seem more supportive and like-minded on this issue than Independents. Democratic and Republican voters support veteran courts at 57 percent and 55 percent, respectively. Support drops significantly to 41 percent among Independents. A majority of Independents, 53 percent, oppose veterans’ courts. Thirty-six percent of Democrats and 41 percent of Republicans oppose veterans’ courts.

Gender. A clear majority of women support veterans’ courts while support is evenly divided among men. Six in ten women, 60 percent, stated they support using these courts while less than one-third of female voters opposed. Only 46 percent of men stated their support for veterans courts while 48 percent opposed.

Age Groups. There is majority support in each of four standardized age groups but significantly more support among voters younger than 35. Two-thirds, 65 percent, of voters younger than 35-years-old support veteran’s courts. For older voters that support dips. Of those 35 to 50 years old, 51 percent support veterans’ courts and that support is the same for voters older than 66 years-old. For voters 51 to 65-years-old, support is slightly higher at 56 percent.

Delio Calzolari, associate director of the Institute and one of the designers of the poll said “although most veterans return to civilian life without encountering the criminal justice system, many do not. Veterans’ court programs are an opportunity to address addiction and mental health issues stemming from military experience but these programs take resources, too,” he continued.

“These are not get-out-of-jail-free cards,” he said. “If a vet fails to complete the program his or her case goes back to criminal court.” Calzolari is a lawyer and a veteran.

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The margin of error for the entire sample of 1,000 voters is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the result would be within plus or minus the reported margin for error for each subsample.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas using the random digit dialing method. Potential interviewees were screened based on whether they were registered voters, and quotas based on area code and sex (<60% female). Interviewers asked to speak to the youngest registered voter at home at the time of the call. Cell phone interviews accounted for 40 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available.

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Field work was conducted from February 15-20. No auto-dial or “robo” polling is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute’s polling web site, simonpoll.org.

Simon Institute polling data are also archived by three academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The three open source data repositories are: the University of Michigan's Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (OpenICPSR), the University of North Carolina's Odum Institute Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

Note: The "Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Poll," the "Simon Poll" and the "Southern Illinois Poll" are the copyrighted trademarks of the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use and publication of these polls is encouraged- but only with credit to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU Carbondale.

Frequency Tables

Some say military veterans charged with crimes should be processed in so-called “veterans’ courts” that could offer post-traumatic stress treatment and substance abuse treatment instead of incarceration. Others say veterans should be processed in the same courts as everyone else. Which comes closer to your view, that...

Remarks: The order that statements were read was randomized.

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Veterans should have special “veterans’ courts”	54%
Veterans should be tried like everyone else	40%
Other/Don’t know	7%
Note: values are rounded and may not sum to 100%.	

Region

Response	Chicago City (n=200)	Chicago Suburbs (n=500)	Downstate/Rural (n=300)
Veterans should have special “veterans’ courts”	53%	53%	55%
Veterans should be tried like everyone else	40%	39%	40%
Other/Don’t know	7%	8%	5%

Political Party

Response	Democrat (n=478)	Independent (n=116)	Republican (n=317)
Veterans should have special “veterans’ courts”	57%	41%	55%
Veterans should be tried like everyone else	36%	53%	41%
Other/Don’t know	7%	7%	4%

Gender

Response	Male (n=478)	Female (n=522)
Veterans should have special “veterans’ courts”	46%	60%
Veterans should be tried like everyone else	48%	32%
Other/Don’t know	5%	8%

Age

Response	Younger than 35 (n=110)	35 to 50 (n=183)	51 to 65 (n=308)	65 and older (n=333)
Veterans should have special “veterans’ courts”	65%	51%	56%	51%
Veterans should be tried like everyone else	29%	43%	39%	42%
Other/Don’t know	5%	6%	5%	7%