State of Louisiana

BOBBY JINDAL
GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Post Office Box 94004
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June 19, 2015

The Honorable Alfred Speer
Clerk of the House of Representatives
State Capitol
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

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JUN 19 2015
House of Representatives
Clerk's Office

Re: House Bill No. 272 by Representative Robert E. Billiot

Dear Mr. Speer:

House Bill No. 272 would expand eligibility for participation in a Veterans Criminal Court program to defendants charged with the following violent crimes: Second Degree Battery, Aggravated Assault, Mingling of Harmful Substances, Simple Kidnapping, Aggravated Criminal Damage to Property, Simple Robbery, Purse Snatching, Extortion, Illegal Use of Weapons or Dangerous Instrumentalities, Terrorism, Aggravated Second Degree Battery, Aggravated Assault upon a Peace Officer with a Firearm, Aggravated Assault with a Firearm, Second Degree Robbery, Disarming of a Peace Officer, Stalking, Second Degree Cruelty to Juveniles, Aggravated Flight from an Officer, Human Trafficking (with an adult), Home Invasion and Domestic Abuse Aggravated Assault.

I am proud of the great strides that Louisiana has made to help our veterans integrate back into the community, facilitate their continuing education, and provide veteran-specific mental health services. In 2014, I proudly signed SB 532 by Senator Guillory, also known as the "Veterans Court Program Treatment Act," which authorized courts to establish specialized Veterans Court programs in various judicial districts tailored specifically for veterans involved in the criminal justice system and focused on reducing criminal recidivism. Current eligibility is strictly limited to defendants charged with non-violent, non-sexual offenses and with no prior violent criminal behavior.

While I have the utmost respect for our servicemen and women and their brave commitment to our country, I am also equally committed to protecting victims of violent crimes and holding offenders accountable for their actions. Under current law, if a defendant completes the requirements of the Veterans Court program, a judge may discharge the defendant from court supervision, set aside the conviction, and dismiss the charges from the defendant's record under articles 893 or 894 of the Louisiana Code of Criminal Procedure. Expanding eligibility to include veteran defendants with violent criminal behavior without requiring (1) a formal mental health diagnosis or a nexus between the veteran defendant's military experience and his or her violent

behavior (2) an exclusion for those who have been dishonorably discharged and (3) input from the victims of crimes such as Second Degree Battery, Domestic Abuse Aggravated Assault is not in the best interest of victims or public safety. Lastly, it is not clear as to whether expanding eligibility to violent crimes would allow the court to suspend and set aside a conviction for violent crimes that are otherwise prohibited under La. C.C.P. 894. For these reasons, I have vetoed House Bill No. 272 and hereby return it to the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

Bobby Jindal
Governor

cc: Honorable Glenn Koepp

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