



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

## Senator Martins' Bill to Better Assist Veterans Signed Into Law

JACK M. MARTINS August 5, 2013

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Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced the signing of a new law that will require local Veterans Service Agencies (VSA) to be accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (US DVA), enabling New York's veterans and their families to prepare and file federal benefits claims at offices in their local communities.

"New York State is committed to giving our veterans the best care possible after they return from serving our nation and defending the freedoms we cherish as Americans," Governor Cuomo said. "This new law will enable local Veterans Service Agencies to better serve our heroes returning from overseas, and give our veterans and their families the ability to apply for vital federal benefits in their own communities. This is another step by New York State in our efforts to be the national model for how state government serves our veterans and their families."

Col (Ret) Eric J. Hesse, Director of the Division of Veterans Affairs, said, "I thank the legislators who sponsored this important bill and Governor Cuomo for signing the law and his leadership in ensuring New York State Veterans and their Families we be receiving assistance from accredited VSOs upon their return to the State. New York State has taken the lead in making sure our returning service members have the support and assistance they

need to successfully transition to civilian life.”

Local VSA directors are appointed by New York county executives and mayors, and are not required to be accredited by the US DVA. Without the federal accreditation, local offices cannot oversee the preparation and submission of claims by veterans and their families for federal benefits.

The new law (A.6221-C / S.5825) signed by the Governor will require that county or city VSA directors be accredited by the US DVA. The New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs can accredit VSA directors and staff at no cost. Training is conducted on-line, one-on-one with a State Veterans Service Counselor, and annually at several geographic locations throughout the State. This new law takes effect in 30 days.

Senator Jack Martins said, "This law will provide veterans throughout the state with a go to person for help getting the benefits they're entitled to. In order to better serve New York's veterans and their families and help them get the state and the federal benefits to which they are entitled, it makes sense for the directors of our VAs across the State to be accredited. This legislation will do just that and increase the number of knowledgeable, trusted, accredited agents who can serve our veterans. I want to thank the Governor for signing this important measure into law."

Assembly Member Michelle Schimel said, "It is crucial that we, in government, ensure that those who have risked their lives defending our country are cared for once they return to civilian life. This law will ensure that veterans and their families receive the benefits to which they are entitled in a more efficient and timely manner. I thank the Governor for realizing the importance of this bill as well as Andy Booth of the Nassau County American Legion for helping me advance this legislation."