



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lee M. Zeldin

## Senators Zeldin and McDonald Secure Funding for PFC Joseph Dwyer Program

LEE M. ZELDIN April 1, 2012

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### **Peer to Peer Pilot Program Targeted to Assist Veterans Suffering from PTSD and TBI**

Sayville, NY- Senator Lee M. Zeldin (R, C, I- Shirley) announced today that the New York State Senate, Assembly and Governor Andrew Cuomo, approved funding for the PFC Joseph Dwyer Program, a pilot program for four counties, including Suffolk County, to help returning veterans cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain

Injury (TBI) by offering a Peer to Peer mentoring program.

Peer support establishes an intervention mechanism and reasonable means to provide assistance to those suffering from PTSD and TBI symptoms. In many instances, peers with the same combat and reintegration issues will benefit from joint participation in the same mentoring program.

PFC Dwyer enlisted in the Army within days of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He served with courage and honor in Iraq, but returned home with PTSD. On June 28, 2008, this illness took his life, leaving behind his wife, Matina, and their two year old daughter, Meagan.

Senator Zeldin, who campaigned for election in 2010, then promised he would spearhead the creation of the PFC Joseph Dwyer Program. Immediately after taking office in 2011, Zeldin formed the Blue Ribbon John P. Jennings Veterans' Advisory Panel to assist him in studying and crafting the framework of the PFC Joseph Dwyer Program.

The panel is named in honor of Infantryman John P. Jennings, a Suffolk County resident who passed away on January 10, 2011. John struggled with the effects of PTSD following a deployment to Iraq from September 2004 to October 2005.

The panel met routinely throughout 2011 and culminated with a joint hearing of the Senate Mental Health Committee and Senator Zeldin on February 28th, in Albany, where members of the John P. Jennings Veterans' Advisory Panel gave testimony on their findings.

"One of the primary conclusions of our Veteran's Advisory Panel was for New York State to help provide peer to peer support. Many times, having a person there with you, who has gone through the same struggles as you, who has been deployed, who has gone through the hardships of re-integrating into our community, is the lifeline our veterans need," said Zeldin.

Senators Zeldin and Roy McDonald (R, C, I- Wilton), then successfully worked to get the funding for the PFC Joseph Dwyer Program into the 2012-2013 State Budget.

The Pilot Program will include the Counties of: Suffolk, Jefferson, Saratoga and Rensselaer.

“Senator McDonald and I have been honored to help New York’s military veterans, who are willing to sacrifice so much for our country, get the assistance they need to cope with the long term effects of PTSD and TBI and transition back to the home front,” concluded Senator Zeldin. “I hope this initiative is most successful and states around the country take similar action. Our nation’s veterans desperately need this help and it is our duty to recognize and address this problem before it’s too late.”

“It's an honor to work with a fellow combat Veteran, Senator Zeldin, to aid our Veterans as they return home and begin the process of assimilating into their communities. This type of peer-to-peer counseling and support structure will assist Veterans who face serious issues like PTSD and give them the help they need," said Senator McDonald.

Senators McDonald and Zeldin are both military veterans. McDonald served in the U.S. Army’s First Cavalry Division as a Forward Observer in the Vietnam War. Zeldin deployed to Iraq in the summer of 2006 with an infantry battalion of fellow paratroopers from the Army’s elite 82nd Airborne Division. Senator Zeldin continues to serve as a Captain in the U.S. Army Reserves.