



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kevin S. Parker

## Parker Seeks to Eradicate the Stigma of Combat-Related Mental Health Issues

KEVIN S. PARKER March 7, 2013

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(Albany, NY) Senator Kevin Parker's education initiative to eradicate the stigma of mental illness faced by veterans passed the Senate Committee of Mental Health and Hygiene. The next step is to pass the Senate Finance Committee and then it is headed to the floor for a vote.

"Our military personnel are exposed to or have experienced much trauma in defending our country. We need to do more to ensure that untreated combat-related mental health and substance abuse issues are addressed and the reality of the mental health needs of military veterans is fully recognized. If we do not eradicate the stigma of mental illness our returning troops, veterans, and their families will continue to suffer from untreated combat-related conditions," stated Senator Parker (D-Bklyn).

According to the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “the impact of military reality on individual mental health is complicated further by the pronounced stigma associated with mental illness within military communities. Service members frequently cite fear of personal embarrassment, fear of disappointing comrades, fear of losing the opportunity for career advancement, and fear of dishonorable discharge as motivation to hide the symptoms of mental illness from colleagues, friends and family. This silence and the attitudes and perceptions perpetuating it pose a significant challenge to those charged with making sure that the United States fighting force is improving itself and taking care of its own members.” <http://www.samhsa.gov/ConsumerSurvivor/listserv/031606.asp>; See also, Williamson, Vanessa and Mulhall, Erin, *Invisible Wounds Psychological and Neurological Injuries Confront a New Generation of Veterans*, IAVA January 2009 Report.

Senate Bill No.1464 requires the Commissioner of the Office of Mental Health in conjunction with the Commissioner of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services and the Director of the Division of Veterans’ Affairs to develop a public education initiative designed to eliminate stigma and misinformation about mental illness and chemical dependence among service members, veterans, and their families. This initiative would help the state and service members improve understanding of mental and substance use disorders, and provide information and resources to access effective treatment.

“As we become more educated as a community about the issues facing those sent off to protect us, we reduce the stigma they face when they return home,” concluded Parker.

#### **About Senator Kevin Parker**

Senator Kevin S. Parker is intimately familiar with the needs of his ethnically diverse community in the heart of Brooklyn that consists of 318,000 constituents in Flatbush, East Flatbush, Midwood, Ditmas Park, Kensington, Windsor Terrace, and Park Slope. He is the Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee, Assistant Democratic Leader for Intergovernmental Affairs, and Chair of the Democratic Task Force on New Americans.

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