



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lee M. Zeldin

## Zeldin and Fellow Senators Speak Out for Veterans at Mental Health Rally

LEE M. ZELDIN March 13, 2013

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Call For Continuation and Expansion of PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Counseling Program

Advocating for mental health services for veterans, Senator Lee M. Zeldin (R-C-I, Shirley) today addressed the Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) at the Association's annual legislative lobby day rally in Albany. The gathering of more than 300 mental health experts, advocates and family members, also included dozens of veterans from Suffolk and Nassau Counties.

Senator Zeldin spoke about the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Veterans Counseling program, a program he helped establish last year in four test counties (Suffolk, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Jefferson) which provides "peer-to-peer" counseling between veterans who personally understand the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Citing federal Veterans Administration statistics which show that up to 20 percent of Iraq and Afghan war veterans, 10 percent of Gulf War (Desert Storm), and 30 percent of Vietnam veterans experience PTSD, Senator Zeldin called for an immediate expansion of the Dwyer

program so that veterans in other regions of the state can receive this service. Specifically, the Senator has proposed expanding the program to Erie, Nassau, Onondaga, Orange, Putnam and Rockland Counties.

“The counseling is free of charge and provided to veterans from other veterans who know exactly what it’s like to cope with and overcome the psychological trauma experienced during intense armed conflict,” said Senator Zeldin, a Major in the U.S. Army Reserves.

“Countless veterans have already benefitted from this excellent program and now we want as many other veterans as possible to receive this service. For our troops coming home from the Middle East and struggling to make the adjustment back into day-to-day life, and for those who served long ago and still suffer the deep effects of combat and loss, we want them to know that they can lean on others who have been experiencing similar issues.”

Also joining Senator Zeldin at the rally were Senator Kathleen A. Marchione, representing Saratoga and Rensselaer Counties; Senator Patricia A. Ritchie, representing Jefferson County; and Senator David Carlucci, Chairman of the Senate Mental Health Committee.

“Thousands of New York veterans are living with the invisible wounds of battle, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI),” said Senator Kathleen A. Marchione (R,C-Halfmoon). “These heroes need continued care, attention and support. I strongly support the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Veterans Counseling program and advocated for its inclusion and expansion within the Senate’s Budget in order to further assist our veterans. I applaud my colleague Senator Lee Zeldin for his continued commitment to this important program that is helping veterans in Rensselaer, Saratoga and other counties who are dealing with PTSD and TBI by providing free counseling services from fellow veterans with similar experiences. Supporting the troops has to be more than just a slogan – we need to match our words with a sustained commitment to funding vital services and important initiatives like the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Veterans

Counseling program that is already helping New York's heroes. Whether they previously served, or are returning home, we must make certain that the courageous service and needs of our veterans are never forgotten. They fought for us, now we need to stand with them."

"The soldiers who serve overseas make the ultimate sacrifice defending our country, and it's so imperative that we provide the necessary resources to support them when they return home," said Senator Patty Ritchie (R-C Heuvelton). "Because our region is home to Ft. Drum, it's especially important that we provide a place for our veterans to go to connect with their peers—many of whom have shared the same experiences and hardships."

"With the rising number of returning veterans suffering from ailments like traumatic brain injury, we must do everything in our power to give our returning troops the services and programs that they need," said Senator Greg Ball, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs. "The expansion of the Dwyer program will allow veterans statewide to receive these services to help them transition back into civilian life."

Senator David Carlucci, Chairman of the Senate Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee said, "The Joseph Dwyer Program has proven itself to be a model of excellence that provides our returning veterans the critical support services they need. This pilot program has exceeded its own expectations and has successfully transformed the lives of countless brave men and women. It is my hope that we can find the necessary funding to launch this success story into the Hudson Valley and beyond."

Senator Bill Larkin (R-C-I, Cornwall-on-Hudson) said, "The PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Counseling Program is an outstanding resource for our veterans and I am pleased to support the proposal to expand it to additional counties. It means so much to our veterans, particularly returning veterans, to be able to speak with someone who has been through

what they have been through and who can provide timely counseling and assistance when they need it the most. This program does just that and I am grateful that additional veterans will have access to these valuable services."

Senator Michael H. Ranzenhofer (R-C-I, Amherst) said, "We know that many of our returning service members can experience nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, and feeling detached when they come home and try to go back to their previous routines and lives. The PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Counseling Program provides these veterans with a way to discuss day-to-day problems with other veterans who have been through the same kind of trauma. It gives veterans a sense of connection to other people again and helps them cope with difficult memories. I will continue to advocate for this very important program. It would be an excellent resource for our veterans in Erie County."

Senator Mark J. Grisanti (R,I-60) said, "Since the founding of this great country, our veterans have been the backbone for our freedoms. In this day, we now know more about the physical and especially the mental toll serving in our Armed Forces has on the individual. When our veterans return home we need programs like the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer to Peer Counseling Program set up in our counties to ensure that every veteran who needs access to help has that access as readily available as possible."

Senator Patrick M. Gallivan (R-C-I, Elma) said, "We are learning more and more every day; that for the brave men and women who serve this country, the battle doesn't end when they return home to American soil. For many, the psychological and emotional impacts of war have long lasting and devastating effects on their mental health and their ability to lead well-adjusted lives. The PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Counseling Program has made great strides for New York's veterans dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and I am excited to see this valuable program expanded to Western New York."