



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Velmanette Montgomery

## Legislative Notebook: State Initiatives of Interest to Veterans

VELMANETTE MONTGOMERY June 26, 2014

| ISSUE: **AGING, AGRICULTURE, BANKS, FAMILIES, CITIES**



Here is a partial listing of bills I have supported this session to aid New York's former servicemen and servicewomen. These initiatives will now go to Governor Cuomo for final action.

-- Legislation I co-sponsored was passed by both houses (S.7839, first introduced as S.4714) to extend the Military Service Credit Law of 2000 to all veterans who have served in the military. Right now, public employees who served in the armed forces may purchase up to three years of pension credit only if their military service occurred during specified conflicts.

This measure will expand this opportunity to public employee veterans who also served their country in peacetime.

-- A bill was approved (S.5955) to make it clear that veterans should not be charged an additional fee if they want to receive a new driver's license or non-driver identification card that includes a notation of their veteran status. Specifically, the measure would waive the \$12.50 photo fee.

-- Legislation was passed by both houses (S.592) that would increase the exemption a veteran may receive on eligible real property from \$5,000 to \$7,500 of the assessed value. By updating the original law, which was enacted more than two decades ago, this initiative would help to make the exemption more meaningful for veterans in terms of today's dollars.

-- A bill was approved by the Senate and Assembly (S.6685) which would make information about post traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and other brain-related injuries more available to veterans and their families through the Veterans Health Care Information Program. In addition, the legislation would require the NYS Department of Corrections to report annually to the Legislature regarding the number and population of veterans who are incarcerated in local and state facilities, thereby providing information that may be used to better aid imprisoned veterans and help to prevent criminal behavior.

-- A technical amendment (S.4819) was approved to correct an error in a 2005 state law providing service credit for those public employees who were called to active military duty in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The earlier law inadvertently omitted members of the New York City retirement systems.

-- In an effort to help military families who are often relocated throughout the course of their service, legislation (S.6887) was passed by the Senate and Assembly to make it easier for

the children of military families to transition into New York State schools; enable veterans who are attending New York colleges and universities under the federal GI bill to qualify for the in-state tuition rate; reform the supplemental burial allowance for veteran families whose loved ones passed away outside of a combat zone; and allow the State Department of State to accept out-of-state licenses in real estate and some other occupations that were issued to members of military families.

-- The Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Act, which has already been signed into law (Chapter 22), is a program that will enable companies owned by service-disabled veterans to more easily compete for lucrative state goods and service contracts. The law sets a goal of providing six percent of state contracts to eligible veteran-owned businesses and establishes a new division within the State Office of General Services (OGS) to oversee and administer the program. Last year we enacted incentives for businesses to hire veterans, and this law breaks new ground in providing new job and economic opportunities for our former armed forces members.

#### 2014-2015 New York State Budget Highlights for Veterans & Their Families

-- Funding for NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs counseling services is increased by \$700,000 over the Governor's initial proposal to \$2.7 million. This will help to ensure that veterans reaching out to the DVA for help receive access to all of the services and programs they need -- including job assistance, mental health and substance abuse services, information about tax breaks, and many other types of aid.

-- A new Veteran Peer-to-Peer support and counseling pilot program is being funded through the State Office of Mental Health (OMH) at \$1.9 million. The initiative will pair veterans with other former servicemen and servicewomen who may be more attuned than civilians to the challenges facing fellow members of the armed forces.

-- Veterans will now be included as participants in the state's entrepreneurial support centers, which will enable former servicemen and servicewomen seeking to start their own businesses to be eligible to apply for Entrepreneurial Assistance Program (EAP) grants and technical help.

-- The income eligibility limit for Gold Star parents to receive an annual annuity of \$500 is being lifted. Gold Star parents are those mothers and fathers who lost a son or daughter in active duty in the Armed Forces during a time of war. Annuity recipients must be New York State residents and applications may be made to the State Division of Veterans' Affairs.

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