



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

PFC Joseph Dwyer Program Comes to Dutchess County

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Serino Announces Funding For Veterans Support Program

POUGHKEEPSIE, NY— Senator Sue Serino (R,C, I—Hyde Park) was joined by local veterans, veterans service representatives and local officials to announce that she successfully secured \$185,000 to fund a unique veterans initiative—the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer

Veterans Support program.

“No one understands the challenges that our veterans face each and every day better than other veterans who experienced those challenges first-hand,” **said Senator Serino.** “The Dwyer program is all about heroes helping heroes in an effort to reverse the stigma that too often accompanies mental health challenges like PTSD and TBI. I am incredibly proud to bring this program home to Dutchess County.”

According to the last count in 2014 from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Dutchess county is home to 18,235 veterans.

The Dwyer Program was created as part of the 2012-13 State Budget with the goal of bringing veterans together in a safe, anonymous environment where they can work jointly to help each other manage the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Named for PFC Joseph Dwyer, a dedicated U.S. Army soldier, who passed away as a result of complications from PTSD and subsequent substance abuse and depression, the Vet-to-Vet program allows our veterans to seek help without fear of retaliation, connects them to important resources and saves lives.

“According to a [recent report](#), between 18 and 22 American Veterans commit suicide each day,” noted Senator Serino. “Those numbers are staggering and we have a responsibility to send the message to our vets that their lives matter and to provide them with the resources they need to help them live full and productive lives after they sacrificed so much to defend ours.”

While the successful program only operates in fifteen select counties across the state, after meeting with countless veterans and hearing their stories directly, Senator Serino lobbied to bring the program to Dutchess and successfully secured the funding in this year’s budget to

do so.

“As someone who has served in combat and as the husband of a licensed-clinical social worker, I know that peer-to-peer support is critically important for veterans suffering from PTSD, traumatic brain injuries and the enormous stress of war,” **said Congressman Chris Gibson.** “Thank you to our veterans for all that they have done to defend our freedoms and thank you to Senator Serino for making the health and safety of our vets a priority.”

Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro said, “Our veterans have sacrificed a great deal in protection of our country and the freedoms we enjoy and we owe them the best support services possible. The PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Veterans Counseling program offers a vital service to our returning veterans, connecting them with support services as well as other veterans who understand the unique challenges they are dealing with and can help them to successfully transition from military to civilian life. We appreciate Senator Serino’s work to bring this program to Dutchess County and we look forward to offering this valuable program to our brave veterans.”

"Peer-to-peer counseling is a proven method to improve mental health among veterans by encouraging an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality for those suffering from PTSD and TBI. The battle for our brave fighting men and women must continue after the war ends. I am grateful to Senator Serino for delivering funding which will allow Dutchess to join the list of counties caring for its veterans through the Dwyer program," **said Rob Rolison (District 8 -- City of Poughkeepsie), Chairman of the Dutchess County Legislature.**

Margaret Hirst, Acting Commissioner for the Dutchess County Department of Mental Hygiene said, “We are grateful to Senator Serino for her advocacy on behalf of our veterans in bringing enhanced mental health services through this valuable Peer to Peer program.”

Nelson Eddy Rivera, USN (Ret), Dutchess County Veterans Services Director said, “We can never underestimate the sacrifices of our military service members. Many of our service members carry the scar of battle with them forever, and at times need a fellow comrade that have walked in the same combat boots to reach out to. That is the goal of The PFC Joseph Dwyer Program - to help fulfill our commitment to take care of our veterans. We are very appreciative of Senator Serino obtaining this grant and look forward to a successful program here in Dutchess County”

Keith O’Hanlon, Chair of Senator Serino’s Veterans Advisory Committee, said, “I very much appreciate Senator Serino’s efforts in securing funds for our veterans. The mental health issue is extremely important as the suicide rate for veterans is three times the national average. If this saves just one veteran’s life, it’s more than worth it.”

Senator Serino concluded by noting that September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month saying, “For our veterans, or for anyone in our communities, who may be suffering in silence, please know that help is always available. You can call the Dutchess County helpline 24/7 at (845) 485-9700.”