



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Mental Health Professionals to Recognize Veterans Day with Two-Day Training

KANIA PONTO, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS November 6, 2015

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**ALBANY, NY** - Social workers and allied mental health professionals will be attending the first of a series of conferences sponsored by the New York State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-NYS) Veterans Mental Health Training Initiative (VMHTI) on Monday, November 9, at the Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel.

The two-day Poughkeepsie conference is the first of four trainings, with the remainder to be offered across the state in 2016. Through a partnership between NASW-NYS, the Medical Society of the State of New York, and the New York State Psychiatric Association, VMHTI, a multi-year comprehensive training project, now enters its fourth year and continues its work to increase the number of community health and mental health professionals who are clinically trained in the assessment and treatment of mental health issues specific to veterans and their families.

With each deployment, our service members encounter extreme strains on their physical and mental health, which in many cases has resulted in unprecedented rates of health and mental health issues, most notably post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries. According to the Rand Center for Military Health Policy Research, approximately 1.7 million service members have been deployed for Operations Enduring

Freedom (OEF) and Operations Iraqi Freedom (OFI) to date; an estimated 300,000 returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are currently suffering from PTSD or major depression, and nearly 320,000 have experienced a TBI during deployment. Equally alarming are numerous reports of increased suicide, addiction, and homelessness among our returning soldiers. Furthermore, family members are struggling with the ramifications of extended and/or multiple deployments, resulting in serious emotional and psychological tolls.

**Chairman of the Senate Committee on Mental Health Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda), said,** “An estimated 22 veterans commit suicide every day nationwide. The need for essential services and outreach for our veterans continues to grow each day as more and more men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces return home. Implementing vital mental health initiatives was a priority for me in this year’s state budget, and we were successful in doing that, but we can never have too many resources. The Veterans Mental Health Training Initiative expands our network of individuals who can help veterans in need and offers them more opportunities to seek that help.”

As service members continue to return to New York, they and their families are often in need of expert mental health care, yet there remains a short supply of mental health and health professionals who are adequately trained mental health and health professionals in veterans-specific mental health issues. Many community health and mental health practitioners, regardless of primary practice area, will ultimately treat those who do, or have, served in the military and/or with their family members including spouses, partners, children, and parents of the service member or veteran.

Since the initial launch of the VMHTI in 2009, over 1600 mental health and human service providers have been trained however the need for additional and more advanced clinical training remains strong. The VMHTI will continue its efforts to eliminate the barriers to accessing quality mental health care for veterans and military families by building the

capacity of the health and mental health workforce to better meet their unique needs.

The 2015-2016 Veterans Mental Health Training Initiative is supported by a grant from the New York State Legislature as part of their efforts to address the unmet mental health needs of returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans and their families.

Upcoming 2016 training sites include Niagara Falls, Long Island, and Syracuse. For more information about the VMHTI, go to: [www.naswnys.org/veterans.html](http://www.naswnys.org/veterans.html)

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## **About NASW-NYS**

*The National Association of Social Workers – New York State Chapter (NASW-NYS) is a membership organization of professional social workers, one of the largest chapters of NASW in the United States with 9,000 members. NASW-NYS works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.*