



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elaine Phillips

## Senator Phillips Secures \$220,000 In State Funding For First Veterans Defense Program On Long Island

ELAINE PHILLIPS April 18, 2018



Continuing her support for veterans across Long Island, Senator Elaine Phillips announced today that she has secured \$220,000 in funding in the 2018-19 state budget for a new Veterans Defense Program (VDP) on Long Island. The Veterans Defense Program provides training, support and legal assistance to attorneys defending veterans and service members.

“Of the nearly 94,000 veterans on Long Island, 30% or 28,200 are at high risk of having PTSD, TBI or depression and many are at significant risk of arrest as their trauma symptoms can

lead to criminal conduct according to studies by the Veterans Administration,” said Senator Elaine Phillips. “Sadly, a growing number of veterans with service-related mental health illnesses are becoming lost in the criminal justice system. This important funding will help those in need by providing legal assistance and ensuring attorneys have the skills and training to defend those who risked their lives to defend us.”

Prior to this funding New York only had two Veterans Defense Program offices, one located in the Capital Region, the other in Western New York.

“Senator Phillips was instrumental in obtaining this funding for a new Long Island office with an attorney and case manager for the Veterans Defense Program,” said Gary Horton, Director of the Veterans Defense Program. “We greatly appreciate Senator Phillips’ leadership support, which will help many justice-involved veterans suffering from mental health conditions to obtain a treatment-oriented approach leading to recovery and family restoration.”

The Veterans Defense Program, a branch of the New York State Defenders Association, provides training and legal assistance to attorneys defending veterans and service members in the family and criminal court systems with a treatment-oriented mitigation approach leading to family restoration and reintegration into society.

The VDP attorneys provide legal assistance, research, and consultation, and advises public defense attorneys representing veterans on military culture, mental health illnesses, and legal approaches focused on treatment and sentencing mitigation. The VDP assists attorneys from pre-trial motions to sentencing and re-entry, guides defenders on obtaining military or mental health experts and provides justice-involved veterans with mentoring and expert referrals.

“As elected officials, we must continue to provide fundamental resources to those who serve our country – not just during their time of duty, but when they return to civilian life, too,” Senator Phillips said. “Thank you to the Veterans Defense Program staff for providing this important training to keep our veterans safe and give them the services they need upon returning home.”

In addition to funding for the Veterans Defense Program, the Senate helped secure \$645,000 in additional funding to expand the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Services Peer-to-Peer Program. The budget also included:

- \$500,000 for the NYS Defenders Association Veterans Defense Program;
- \$450,000 for the Veteran's Mental Health Training Initiative;
- \$100,000 for the Veterans Justice Project;
- \$50,000 for the Vietnam Veterans of America New York State Council;
- \$200,000 for Helmets-to-Hardhats;
- \$25,000 for the Veterans Miracle Center; and
- \$125,000 for Veterans of Foreign Wars NYS Chapter Field Service Operations.