



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David Carlucci

## Senator Carlucci, Veterans & BRIDGES Call For \$4.7 Million in the NYS Budget to Fund PTSD Program

SENATOR DAVID CARLUCCI March 22, 2019

| ISSUE: **VETERANS**



New City, NY – Senator David Carlucci (D-Rockland/Westchester) joined fellow elected officials, advocates, and area veterans at BRIDGES in New City to call for \$4.7 million in the New York State budget to fund and expand the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program.

Currently, Governor Cuomo has no money allocated to the program in his budget proposal, which helps service-members suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, about 20 veterans take their own life every day.

“It is shameful that the Governor did not provide funding for the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program. This is about supporting the men and women who sacrificed their lives for our freedom and may return needing our help. We cannot let PTSD and TBI take another veteran’s life, which is why I support \$4.7 million in funding for this program in our state’s budget,” **said Senator David Carlucci.**

The PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program offers returning service-members counseling through a peer-to-peer program that is military-friendly and feels familiar to veterans. The program focuses on helping veterans overcome the challenges of readjustment and offers them a way of getting services without the stigmas often associated with mental health issues. Services are free and confidential.

The Rockland based program is operated through BRIDGES and supported by the Rockland County Departments of Mental Health and Veteran Services Agency.

Funding for the program is critical in Rockland because it would help in veteran family supports, educational outreach, cultural competency training, and the Veteran Service Animal Program, among other things.

“It can be very difficult for a veteran to admit that he or she may have PTSD and may need help. Veterans are the defenders of others, and because of this many times a veteran will wait until he or she is in a near crisis or crisis situation before reaching out for help,” **said Susan Branam, Director of Rockland County’s Veterans Service Agency.** “When they do reach out

for help, we know statistically that they have a much better chance of discussing their issues with another veteran. This is what the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program does, it pairs up one veteran with another veteran, as a "battle buddy," so that they are not facing their demons alone."

"There is several millions of dollars allocated to renaming the new Tappan Zee Bridge across the state. This is a non-essential expense. Meanwhile, we have men and woman who have risked their lives for our country, served time overseas and inland to protect our rights as Americans. It would cost the state a little below \$4 million a year to fund," **said CEO of BRIDGES, Carlos Martinez.** "This is not only an essential expense; it is an investment to our community and to the people who risked their lives, some of whom acquired disabilities in the process. We need to protect this funding and support our veterans!"

Since the program's inception in 2012, thousands of veterans have participated countywide. The program is also offered in 22 other counties, including Westchester and Suffolk.

"The Dwyer program is critical to ensuring that our veterans receive the support and counseling they need to rebuild their lives and cope with the lingering effects of combat," **said Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone.** "Senator Carlucci understands the importance of providing access to mental health care, and I join him in calling for the state legislature to restore this funding for all 23 counties that serve our heroes."

The program is named after Private First Class Joseph Dwyer, who was a U.S. Army Combat Medic and a Suffolk County resident that served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. PFC Dwyer received national attention after a photograph surfaced that showed him carrying a wounded Iraqi boy, while his unit was fighting its way to Baghdad. After returning home and struggling with PTSD, PFC Dwyer succumbed to his condition, taking his own life in 2008.

## 2019-S1141

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- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
- - Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
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January 11, 2019

In Senate Committee [Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs](#)

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