



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

## Senator Helming Fights Against Cuts to Veterans Programs

SENATOR PAM HELMING March 27, 2019

| ISSUE: **VETERANS SERVICES, JOSEPH P. DWYER VETERANS PEER TO PEER PROGRAM**



GENEVA – Senator Pam Helming today called on Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders to restore funding for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer-to-Peer Program and Warrior Salute Program, which provide critical services to military veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, depression, and other invisible wounds of war. Last year, Senate Republicans secured \$645,000 in additional funding to expand the Dwyer Program to an additional seven counties, bringing total funding for this successful program to \$3.7 million and increasing its reach to 23 counties across New York State. In last year's

budget, Senator Helming secured \$200,000 for the Webster-based Warrior Salute Program.

This year, the Senate Majority has increased funding for the Dwyer Program by \$1 million in its budget to expand its reach to four more counties but has not included funding for the Warrior Salute Program. The Governor and the Assembly Majority have eliminated funding for both of these programs in their respective budgets.

“Whether they served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, or anywhere else at home or abroad during their military careers, our veterans deserve our utmost respect and appreciation for leaving their homes and families and putting their lives on the line to defend our freedoms, protect our way of life, and keep our world safe. However, our thanks cannot and should not stop at a simple handshake and a smile. With post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and other issues becoming more prevalent and prominent as a result of our current wars, we as a government and as a society must do all we can to care for our veterans and give them back their health. The Dwyer and Warrior Salute Programs do just that by providing veterans services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. With 22 veterans taking their own lives each day across our country, it would be an understatement to say that any cuts to programs benefitting our veterans would be devastating. On behalf of our veterans and our region, I strongly urge Governor Cuomo and Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins to restore funding for the Dwyer and Warrior Salute Programs in the final state budget,” Senator Helming said.

CDS Life Transitions President & CEO Sankar Sewnauth said, “Warrior Salute Veterans Services provides support to brave men and women who have served their country and are suffering from PTSD, traumatic-brain injury, and military sexual trauma. Many of these men and women are homeless. Warrior Salute provides housing, transportation, food, and a wide complement of clinical services. During the past seven years, the program has graduated more than 90 percent of the 250 veterans that have come through its doors. Without this

funding, this program is in grave jeopardy of continuing. We ask that the funding is fully restored.”

The Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Program and Warrior Salute Program help those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and depression. The programs empower veterans to meet with other veterans in a safe, secure, comfortable atmosphere so they may help one another by providing life-saving counseling services and support. Military veterans are much more likely to confer in, and trust, their peers who have endured similar experiences.

In February, Senator Helming sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins urging the Senate to restore funding for the Dwyer Program in its budget. Additionally, Senator Helming has urged Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders to provide \$300,000 in funding for the Warrior Salute Program.

The statistics show an urgent need for these programs. For example, an estimated 400,000 service members live with PTSD and TBI, including an estimated 11 to 20 percent of service members returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Most importantly, people suffering from PTSD are six times more likely to commit suicide.

With these numbers in mind, Senator Helming believes both these programs are deserving of inclusion in this year’s state budget. New York State must ensure a sustained commitment to funding initiatives that make a positive difference in our veterans’ lives. The Senate and the Assembly continue to pass legislation designed to support our veterans. However, when it comes to funding for critical veterans programs, both houses have not done their part to take care of our veterans.