



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John E. Brooks

## Pols: State Money for Veterans-Support Program Restored

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| ISSUE: **JOSEPH P. DWYER VETERANS PEER TO PEER PROGRAM , HOMELAND SECURITY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS, PTSD, VETERANS FUNDING**

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County Executive Steve Bellone gathered with Suffolk lawmakers and veterans advocates Friday to celebrate the restoration of funding for a veterans-support program inspired by the death of a Suffolk Army medic — funds that had initially been omitted during

negotiations over the state's \$175 billion budget.

At a veterans hall in Wyandanch, Bellone touted the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Project as having helped more than 10,000 former military personnel battle with often debilitating psychological disorders associated with extreme fear and stress encountered during military service.

Known generally as post-traumatic stress disorder, this psychological condition often manifests itself in sleeplessness, paranoia, extreme rage, severe depression, social isolation and suicidal thoughts.

"This model veterans program has a proven track record that has no doubt saved lives across the state," Bellone said.

Bellone was joined by a host of other officials, including state Sens. John Brooks (D-Seaford), Jim Gaughran (D-Huntington), and Monica Martinez (D-Brentwood), representatives of several veterans organizations, and health advocates.

The program is named for Pfc. Joseph Dwyer, an Army medic whose image cradling a frightened child became an early icon of the Iraq War.

The Mount Sinai resident battled post-traumatic stress disorder upon his return from combat, and succumbed to a chemical overdose in 2008.

Negotiations in Albany restored some \$3.7 million in Dwyer program funding to the budget that went into effect April 1 — funding that had not been included in early budget drafts. Lawmakers also added \$300,000 to expand the program to New York City, according to Bellone's office.

The program, which was hatched in Suffolk County in 2012 and later was duplicated in Nassau, currently is offered in 22 New York counties.