



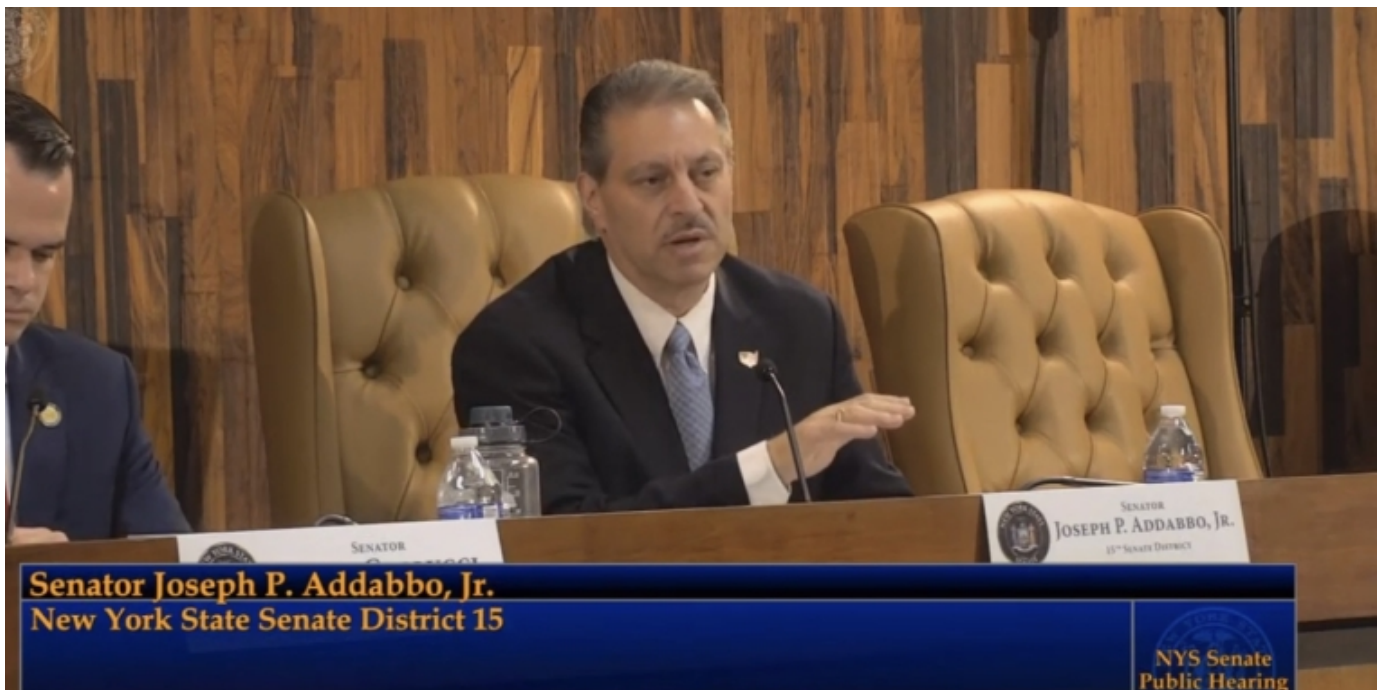
NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

## Addabbo intends to focus on veterans suicide rate during 2020 legislative session

SENATOR JOSEPH P. ADDABBO, JR. November 27, 2019

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On the heels of Veterans Day, State Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. is looking forward to the upcoming 2020 legislative session up in Albany to work on helping veterans deal with mental health and other issues after returning from service, in an effort to reduce the military's suicide rate.

Addabbo recently attended a NYS Senate public hearing in Rockland County on veteran's mental health and well-being where the Senate Standing Committee on Mental Health and Development Disabilities heard testimony from medical professionals and institutions, veteran's services agencies, and veterans themselves on the problems veterans and active military personnel face dealing with and accessing treatment for mental health issues.

According to a Veterans Administration study that was presented at the hearing, 22 veterans commit suicide every day, and according to the National Center for PTSD, more than 1 in 10 veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many veterans also find it difficult to find work and housing after their service, leading to an increase in homelessness among veterans, which can negatively affect a veteran's mental health.

During the testimony, Marianne Goodman, M.D., a psychiatrist and professor of psychiatry at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, stated that many veterans do not seek Veterans Affairs (VA) care. They instead go to their primary care doctors, who may not even know their patient is a veteran. Without proper outreach to the veterans, many do not know of the services of which they are entitled.

Goodman also noted that through funding in the state budget, the New York State Psychiatric Association (NYSPA), Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY) and the New York Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-NYS) have been able to grow the Veterans Mental Health Training Initiative. The Veterans Mental Health Training Initiative trains and educates the interdisciplinary team of primary care specialists and community mental health providers on veteran-specific mental health issues.

"The continued funding of these important programs is critical if our state is to continue its efforts to better assist our veterans when they return home," Addabbo, a member of the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee, said. "However, we can

fund the best programs in the country, but if veterans do not know about them, they are useless. We need to do a better job of outreach to veterans to make them aware of the services they can access.”

One such program that veterans need to be made more aware of is the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Mental Health Program. This program allows veterans a chance to talk to other veterans about what they are experiencing since returning home and can really help veterans open up about their issues. Addabbo noted that because of the increase in state funding for the Dwyer Peer-to-Peer program, it will be expanded for the first time to a location within the five boroughs of the city.

“There is still a stigma among veterans and active military members that mental health issues are seen as a sign of weakness,” the Senator added. “We all know that not to be true, but by allowing veterans to speak with other veterans, they can feel more comfortable speaking and relating their issues, because veterans more than anyone else know what other vets have gone through during their tours of duty. I am proud to have been involved in helping the Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Program to expand, and in the 2020 session, I will work even harder to ensure that this program remains funded.”

Many times veterans find it difficult to find steady work when returning home. These individuals come from a military culture where they are given their orders and they carry them out. However, when they are re-integrating to civilian life, they may feel that they do not have that purpose they once had in the armed forces. This, along with issues such as PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and other traumas can lead to increased homelessness among the veteran population. “I truly believe that when we address the various issues facing our veterans, we will witness a reduction in their suicide rate.” Addabbo stated.

The Senator feels that by increasing funding for programs or initiatives that help veterans find work and keep work, New York State can do a better job at providing veterans with the resources they need to remain viable members of the community and keep their mental health strong. Addabbo has recently supported The Veteran Initiative, a job training and placement program for veterans. More information on the Veterans Initiative can be found at <https://www.veteransrebuildinglife.org/veteran-contact/> or by calling (718) 606-6349.

“When our veterans return home they face a very unique set of challenges and it is our responsibility as elected officials to ensure that their transition from military life back to civilian life is as smooth as can be,” Addabbo said. “These men and women sacrifice so much for our country that we must do all that we can to help them after their service is over. That is why I consider every day to be Veterans Day and will continue to work on the issues relating to our veterans in the 2020 Legislative Session, by introducing new legislation aimed at better funding of veterans programs and resources so we can get our veterans all the services they earned when they decided to defend our country.”