



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## SERINO SUCCESSFUL IN EFFORTS TO RESTORE FUNDING FOR VET2VET PROGRAM

SUSAN SERINO April 3, 2020

| ISSUE: **JOSEPH DWYER PEER-TO-PEER VETERANS' SUPPORT PROGRAM, NYS BUDGET**



ALBANY, NY—Senator Sue Serino today announced that funding for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program (Vet2Vet) has been fully restored in this year's State Budget. The program plays a critical role in ensuring local veterans struggling with PTSD, TBI, or other mental health challenges have access to the resources they need to thrive here in our community.

*“I cannot say it enough, Vet2Vet saves lives,” said Senator Sue Serino. “The Dwyer Program plays a critical role in the lives of countless veterans here in our local community, and it is needed now, more than ever. In a tremendously difficult budget year, it was an uphill battle, but I am proud to have been able to play a role in getting this funding restored. While this year’s budget also gave the Governor the authority to reduce state spending if the budget becomes unbalanced, I will continue to fight to ensure that this vital program is protected and preserved. Thank you to everyone who made their voices heard and helped fight for our veterans to have access to the resources they need to thrive here in our community.”*

*Adam Roche, Program Manager MHA Vet2Vet, said, “Our fearless veterans made a commitment to defend our country and risk their lives to do so. Unfortunately, many of our veterans have come home with both physical and mental scars that demand and deserve help from our government. We shouldn't have to beg politicians to fund a program as vital and necessary as MHA of Dutchess Vet2Vet. I thank our local lawmakers for standing with us in our fight and am glad to see the important funding has been restored, but we will not stop fighting to ensure that this program becomes a permanent part of the state budget.”*

*John Bourges, Program Coordinator, Joseph P. Dwyer Program of Putnam County, said, “We spend most of our time finding the isolated, dis-enfranchised, and the outlier who has no support system. But it is through our program, and programs like us, that gets them to re-engage with society and no longer feel alone or remain isolated. Now, as we respond to the COVID crisis, those very same people are being forced back into isolation. The Dwyer program is even more critical now, and I am happy to see its funding has been restored so that we can continue our important work.”*

Senator Serino has been fighting for this funding since the start of the year when it was once again left out of the Executive Budget Proposal. [In February, she joined a bi-partisan press conference](#), lead by Senator John Brooks, Chair of the Senate’s Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs, calling for the program to be fully funded and expanded.

The Dwyer Program—named for an Iraqi War Veteran who lost his life as a result of his struggle with PTSD— was initially launched in only four counties throughout the state in 2012. It uses a unique and confidential peer-to-peer counseling approach to empower veterans and their families and to create a local network of support for our servicemen and women. Since its inception, the program has proven to be so successful that it had been

expanded to 24 counties and New York City. This year's budget not only fully funded the programs in these counties, but expanded the Dwyer Program to two more counties in the Hudson Valley, Sullivan and Ulster.

The final state budget also included \$5 million to help provide housing for homeless veterans and \$1 million to support suicide prevention efforts among veterans and first responders.

When Senator Serino first took office in 2015, she was made aware of the program after launching a local 'Veterans Advisory Board' and worked tirelessly to successfully secure funding to launch the program in Dutchess County and preserve it in Putnam.

For more information on the Vet2Vet program in Dutchess County, please click [here](#). For information on the program in Putnam County, please click [here](#).