



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

Sen. Metzger and Local Veteran Advocates Discuss Mental Health, Housing, and Transportation Issues in COVID-19 Online Series

JEN METZGER June 27, 2020

| ISSUE: **MILITARY SERVICE, VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES, SUICIDE PREVENTION**



Hudson Valley and Catskills, NY...State Senator Jen Metzger (SD-42) hosted a [Facebook livestream discussion](#) on regional veteran resources as part of the Senator's online COVID-19 [Community Conversations series](#) on Thursday evening. She was joined by Larry Neumann from the [Orange County Vet2Vet program](#) and Staff Sergeant Doug Sandberg, who hosts "Let's Talk Vets" on [WJFF Radio Catskill](#), for a discussion of challenges facing veterans, the resources and services available to them, and the impacts of the pandemic on these services.

According to Neumann, the biggest and most challenging issue for veterans is housing, with many veterans experiencing homelessness. "Victory Village," a tiny-home community for veterans proposed by the [Rumshock Veterans Foundation](#), was mentioned by Neumann and Sandberg as an innovative model for addressing the issue that integrates transportation, employment opportunities, and social connection.

In addition to housing, a lack of transportation options was highlighted as a major problem for many veterans, especially in rural communities. While veterans' service organizations do offer transportation for Veterans Affairs (VA) medical appointments, Neumann noted that veterans often struggle with day-to-day transportation needs, such as going to the store. Wheelchair-accessible buses and medical vans are also not as readily available for veterans with disabilities. To address this need in Sullivan County, Senator Metzger this year recommended the County for a grant to purchase a wheelchair-accessible van for veterans transportation.

As COVID-19 spread through the Hudson Valley and Catskills, many local veteran programs had to pivot to delivering their services remotely and virtually, and they needed to put protocols in place for necessary in-person services. Neumann pointed out, however, that programming like tai chi classes was successfully shifted outdoors.

Veterans can face challenges reintegrating into civilian life, and many struggle with PTSD and depression. Neumann, a Navy veteran, highlighted resources available to assist veterans with PTSD, depression, and suicidal thoughts, sharing both his personal phone number and the National Veterans Suicide Hotline, 1-800-273-8255. He also noted that the VA hospitals were well equipped to help veterans with these issues.

Senator Metzger has introduced legislation ([S6712](#)) designating September 22 as Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day to recognize and remember veterans we have lost,

elevate this issue in public consciousness, and bring attention to the need to address the root causes so that further tragic loss of life can be prevented. The 22nd day of the month was chosen in recognition of an earlier report of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that 22 veterans commit suicide per day, on average. Metzger hopes the legislation will be passed this session.

A second, related bill by Senator Metzger ([S8283](#)) would establish the Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Flag as the official state flag to raise awareness of veteran suicide, and remember and honor those who have served this country and have fallen victim to this epidemic.

“In New York and across our country, the invisible wounds of war have led to alarmingly high suicide rates among veterans,” **said Senator Metzger.** “It’s vital that we work together to connect our veterans and their families to the incredible array of federal, state, county, and community-based service partners working to help our veterans thrive, and assess the blind spots in our communities that hinder them before it’s too late.”

Larry Neumann, Program Supervisor of the Orange County Vet2Vet said, “The pandemic has completely changed the landscape for human service providers. Programs such as Dwyer/Vet2Vet have had to change the way in which they perform outreach, face-to-face interaction with clients and delivery of services. At the same time, the need for those services has increased exponentially. While this is certainly a challenge, being part of a community of service providers, such as the Hudson Valley Veteran Task Force, has created opportunities to network and tap into services as they are needed. With access to over 100 individuals and service providers, there are always resources available to address practically any need. No veteran should feel alone during this challenging time nor do they need to be. People and agencies are standing by ready to assist in whatever manner necessary. As a nation, we must put our veterans first, as they put us first by serving us while in the military.

“Thank you, Senator Metzger, for recognizing and supporting our military and veteran population and giving Dwyer/Vet2Vet an opportunity for sharing of information and outreach during this critical time,” **said Neumann.**

In April, Senator Metzger was able to secure funding in the 2020-2021 State Budget to expand the widely lauded Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Project to Sullivan and Ulster Counties, which will provide peer-to-peer counseling and support to veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, and other mental health issues. Senator Metzger also successfully advocated for restoring full funding to existing Dwyer programs, including Orange County's highly successful [Vet2Vet](#) program, that Neumann supervises.

The Senator's [Community Conversations](#) series has been running over the last nine consecutive weeks, first twice-weekly, and then live on Thursdays at 5:00 PM on [her Facebook page](#). The online series is designed to engage local experts in discussions on COVID-19 topics important to Hudson Valley and Catskill communities. Additional topical events in the series will be announced as New York State continues to grapple with the novel coronavirus global pandemic.

Jen Metzger represents the 42nd Senate District, which includes all of Sullivan County and parts of Delaware, Orange, and Ulster Counties. Senator Metzger serves as Chair of the Agriculture Committee and sits on the Environmental Conservation, Education, Health, Energy and Telecommunications, Local Government, Women's Issues, Domestic Animal Welfare, and Legislative Commission on Rural Resources Committees.

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RELATED LEGISLATION

2019-S6712

- 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
-

Establishes September twenty-second of each year as a day of commemoration known as
Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day

September 13, 2019

In Assembly Committee

Sponsored by **Jen Metzger**

Do you support this bill?
