



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

## Sen. Metzger Joins Local Leaders and Veteran Advocates to Celebrate State Senate Passage of Bill Proclaiming 9/22 'Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day'

JEN METZGER July 25, 2020

| ISSUE: **VETERAN SUICIDE AWARENESS, ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, JOSEPH P. DWYER VETERAN PEER SUPPORT PROJECT**



**Orange County, NY...**State Senator Jen Metzger (SD-42) held a press conference Friday with local leaders and veterans advocates outside the American Legion Post 151 in Wallkill to announce the State Senate's unanimous vote in support of her bill ([S6712](#)) designating September 22 as "Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day," an annual statewide

observance. Metzger has been a strong advocate of programs to provide support to veterans, particularly in the area of mental health. In April, she successfully secured continued funding in the state budget for the Vet2Vet program in Orange County, and secured additional funding to create new veteran peer support programs in Sullivan and Ulster Counties.

The date of September 22 for the observance is significant: The month of September is recognized as National Suicide Prevention Month and the number 22 is the average number of veterans lost to suicide in the U.S. each day, based on a statistic from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). According to a 2016 National Suicide Data Report from the VA, when compared to the general adult population, the rate of suicide among veterans is 1.4 times higher among male veterans and 1.8 times higher among female veterans. In 2016, alone, 153 veterans in New York committed suicide.

The idea for the legislation first came out of a conversation between Metzger and constituent Manny Tirado and his colleague, Kevin Hertell, both members of the MTA NYC Transit Veterans Resource Group, which is the official veterans organization for New York City Transit employees who are military veterans and active reservists.

"An annual observance will help elevate public consciousness of veteran suicides, honor those we've lost, and break down the stigma that prevents veterans from seeking help," **said Senator Jen Metzger.** "It is vital that we all continue to work together to support our veterans and connect them and their families with the resources they need to thrive."

Attendees of the event included Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther (SD-100), Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus, Town of Wallkill Supervisor Frank DenDanto, Middletown Mayor Joseph DeStefano, and representatives of veterans organizations from around the 42nd Senate District.

**Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus said,** “It was a pleasure joining elected officials and veterans to discuss veteran suicide. This issue is extremely important to me and it was gratifying to spend some time with veterans from throughout our community. Initiatives such as Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day will bring even more attention to veterans’ suicide and the challenges that these brave men and women face.”

**Kevin Hertell, a United States Air Force Veteran and founder of The Veterans Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Flag Corp. said,** “Senator Metzger and I have been working on this bill since last summer, and I’m so grateful for her leadership and support in bringing this bill to the Senate, and now facilitating it’s passage.”

**Carol Olszanecki of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association said,** “Veterans and their families need to know that they are not alone. Senator Metzger’s Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day bill is one step forward in helping educate veterans’ loved ones so that they can recognize when their veteran is having a hard day and help prevent future tragedies.”

**Ulster County Veterans Services Agency Director Mark Cozzupoli said,** “It was great attending today’s press conference and seeing the support for our Veterans in need. Unfortunately, Veterans suicide is an epidemic that is not going away, but establishing September 22nd as Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day will help keep this crisis at the forefront of our community members. The more attention that is brought, the more we can connect our true American Heroes with the resources they need.”

**Charles Piper of the Delaware County Suicide Prevention Committee said,** “Through the due diligence of Senator Metzger, Veteran Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day is one step closer to being set in stone. The meaning behind this action is difficult to put in to words because suicide is not discussed. If this bill becomes law, discourse will happen and veterans

in all areas, including my own Delaware County, will realize that suicides occur and we can do something to stop them. Discussing veteran suicide shouldn't trigger shame, and the Senator's efforts will instead assist all veterans in opening the door for helpful conversations.”

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. She hopes to have the bill come to the Senate floor for a vote this year. The Senator in 2019 also helped to secure \$200,000 in state funding to support Legal Services of the Hudson Valley's Veterans and Military Families Advocacy Project (VMFAP), which provides free legal services to qualifying veterans, active military and their families on civil matters including navigating the VA and other systems to make sure that veterans receive the benefits and assistance that they need.

Veterans and Service Members in crisis can contact the Veteran Crisis Line at any time by dialing 1-800-273-8255 and selecting option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their family members can also text 838255 or visit [VeteransCrisisLine.net](#) to connect with a Veterans Affairs responder.

*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

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## 2019-S6712

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- 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
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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?

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