



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Fred Akshar

1.14.21 - Senate Republican Conference Calls on Majority to Release Funding for Joseph P. Dwyer Program

FRED AKSHAR January 14, 2021

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



Senator Fred Akshar and members of the Senate Republican Conference today **sent a letter** to Senator John Brooks, Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs, calling on the Democratic Majority to take the steps necessary to release funding allocated in last year's budget for the **Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Support** Program.

The program, established with wide-ranging bipartisan support in 2012, provides mental health support services to veterans through New York State. The 2020-21 state budget included approximately \$4.5 million in funding for the program, but the Senate Majority has thus far not requested the Office of Mental Health or the Division of the Budget to release the funding.

"Since we first secured these services for our community, Joseph P. Dwyer program has been there for thousands of our local veterans across the Southern Tier and beyond. During the current COVID-19 crisis, this funding has helped address veterans' food insecurity, homelessness, lack of social engagement, and the need for career services support. New York needs to keep its promises to veterans in our community and across our state. They've upheld their commitment to our nation, New York needs to uphold its commitment to them." said Senator Fred Akshar.

The Dwyer Program—named for an Iraq 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 model 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 has been expanded to 23 counties across New York State.

"As a combat veteran, I fully understand the difference the services provided by the Joseph P. Dwyer program can make in the lives of our veterans who are struggling. The need for these critically important services has only been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, and I urge my colleagues in the Majority to take the necessary steps to make sure these funds are released as soon as possible," said Senate Republican Leader Ortt.

"As the representative of Fort Drum and an area of our state where many veterans settle

following their military careers, I have seen firsthand the important role played by the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program. Year after year, this program helps connect veterans with the support they need to overcome the challenges in their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more critical to assist our nation's heroes. I urge the Senate Majority to take steps to see that funds promised to the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program are made available as soon as possible," said Senator Patty Ritchie, Ranking Member of the Senate's Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee.

"The Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Support Program is vital in connecting veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries and help them find the emotional support they need to heal the invisible wounds of war. Given the social isolation and stressors that people have felt on their health, jobs and family caused by the pandemic, cutting funding for the Joseph P. Dwyer Program at this time could be tragic. Our service members have sacrificed so much to keep us safe and free. The State needs to fully fund this life-saving program," said Senator Jim Tedisco, Ranking Member of the Senate Mental Health Committee.

"Suffolk County includes our state's largest concentration of military veterans who, like Joseph Patrick Dwyer, gave selflessly to defend and protect our freedom, and many of them are among countless veterans across this state who have benefited from Pfc. Dwyer's namesake program to find healing and recovery from the hidden wounds of war. We owe it to Pfc. Dwyer's memory -- and to all these American heroes -- to keep our promise and help them fully return to their families and communities," said Senator Alexis Weik.

The letter, which is attached, was signed by every member of the Senate Republican Conference, and calls on the Majority to take the necessary steps to release this important

funding as soon as possible.