



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Anthony H. Palumbo

## Long Island Senate GOP Delegation Joins Congressman Zeldin in Calling on Governor to Fund Critical Veterans Program

ANTHONY H. PALUMBO March 24, 2021

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



# FULLY FUND THE JOSEPH P. DWYER PROGRAM

Elected Officials are Demanding a Restoration of Funding after Governor Zeroes Out Funding in Budget Proposal

As the April 1 deadline for approval of New York State's Budget nears, Senators Phil Boyle, Alexis Weik, Mario Mattera, and Anthony Palumbo, Long Island's Republican Delegation to the New York State Senate, joined Congressman Lee Zeldin in calling on Governor Andrew Cuomo to restore funding for the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Program. The Dwyer Program,

initiated in 2012 by then State Senator Zeldin, provides essential peer-to-peer mental health support to veterans across New York State and has been immensely impactful in providing veterans with much-needed emotional assistance during reintegration into civilian life. The Dwyer program is especially a priority to Long Island, as Suffolk County is home to the largest population of veterans in New York State. In fact, Suffolk County has one of the largest populations of veterans of any county in the United States.

“The Joseph P. Dwyer Program has been a resounding success, beginning in Suffolk County and expanding to counties across the State. I look forward to the Legislature fully restoring this critical funding in the Enacted Budget. Our veterans sacrificed for us—we owe it to them to ensure they are provided the services they need when they return home,” stated Senator Weik.

“In Fiscal Year 2021, the funding for the Dwyer program totaled \$4.5 million. This year, Governor Cuomo proposed completely eliminating funding for this life-saving program. We demand the Governor restore funding to this critical support resource for our heroes,” stated Senator Boyle.

Joseph P. Dwyer was a United States Army combat medic in the Iraq War who was portrayed in an iconic photo carrying a young Iraqi boy away from danger. After Dwyer's return home from service overseas, he struggled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. After PFC Dwyer's return home from service overseas, he struggled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Congressman Lee Zeldin, a veteran himself, was instrumental in the creation of the Dwyer Program during his time as a New York State Senator.

“The PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Support Program saves lives, and at a time when so many of our communities' veterans feel more isolated than ever before, funding for this critical program has never been more important. This effective, efficient and tailored program has

always received bipartisan support from our local governments up to the State Capitol. However, year after year, this veterans program has been cut off and used as a political ploy in Albany's budget negotiations, and playing games with our veterans' lives is unacceptable. Not only must full funding for the Dwyer Program be restored in this year's final budget, but this program's funding must become a permanent component of all future state budgets," said Congressman Zeldin.

The New York State Senate Majority recently released its one-house bill with a proposal of \$4.5 million for funding the Dwyer program, and the New York State Assembly's one-house bill proposed \$6.05 million. In light of this development, the elected officials are demanding that Governor Cuomo approve the Assembly proposal and make permanent the Dwyer Program, which would be, quite literally, lifesaving.

"Congressman Zeldin led the effort to create this invaluable program and we must continue to build on his work to benefit all of our veterans. As we continue to negotiate our future spending plan, it is essential that Governor Cuomo include the funding needed to maintain and build this invaluable program in the final budget so that those who have been there for our nation when called know that we stand with them when they need us," stated Senator Mattera.

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*"The PFC Joseph P. Dwyer peer support program is an essential support mechanism for veterans in Suffolk County, which has one of the largest veteran populations in the nation. This critical funding must be included in this year's finalized budget, as well as all future state spending plans. The mental health and wellbeing of our veterans is too important to have this life saving program placed on the chopping block year after year," stated Senator Palumbo.*

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Last year's Final State Budget included \$4.5 million in funding for the Dwyer Program, although a large portion was withheld by the Executive for months on end. The Governor's budget proposal this year left out the Dwyer Program entirely.