



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## SERINO LEADS BIPARTISAN PUSH TO GET STATE FUNDING TO HELP HEROES

SUSAN SERINO November 10, 2021



POUGHKEEPSIE, NY – With Veterans Day just around the corner, Senator Sue Serino and Assemblymember Didi Barrett today brought local veterans together to urge state officials to make a firm commitment to funding the much-lauded Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Program (Vet2Vet) in the next State Budget.

Each year, veterans from across the state make the trek to Albany to fight for funds for the program, which uses a unique peer-to-peer model to offer non-clinical support and

assistance for veterans who may be struggling with PTSD, TBI or other mental health challenges. Despite the program's noted success across the state, year after year, funding for the program has been left out of the former Governor's annual Executive Budget Proposals and left to the Legislature to negotiate for funding to keep the programs going.

At a press conference at the Dutchess Vet2Vet Office in Poughkeepsie, lawmakers and Hudson Valley veterans called on Governor Kathy Hochul to include funding for the program in her first Executive Budget Proposal and detailed the myriad of ways the program has positively impacted veterans and their families in the local community.

*“Tomorrow, our community will come together to honor the service and sacrifice of our nation’s brave veterans, and while these ceremonies are incredibly meaningful, we must do more to show our appreciation and commitment to those who have selflessly sacrificed so much for our country and our community,” said Senator Serino. “Vet2Vet saves lives and has proven to be an invaluable resource for countless veterans and their families. New York has the opportunity to be a model for the nation, and I urge Governor Hochul, and my colleagues in the Legislature, to do all we can to commit to helping our heroes by taking the guesswork out of the budget process and ensuring Vet2Vet is consistently funded.”*

*“During the years that I have chaired the New York State Assembly Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I have had to fight each budget cycle to ensure funding for the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Vet2Vet Program remains,” said Assemblymember Didi Barrett, Chair of the Assembly’s Veterans Affairs Committee. “And while we have managed to secure and increase funding each year, our veterans and their families should know that New York State has their back by putting the critical Dwyer funding in the executive budget. This highly successful peer support network has been a lifeline for New York State’s veterans’ and their families and I urge Governor Kathy Hochul to include funding for the Joseph P. Dwyer Vet2Vet Program in the 2022-23 Executive Budget proposal.”*

*Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro said, “The Dwyer Vet2Vet Program has been a categorical success, truly reaching our veterans on a peer-to-peer level and positively impacting many of our heroes – the program has undoubtedly saved lives. From the program’s inception in Dutchess County, Sen. Serino has championed the effort to secure state funds for it, and her efforts have made an immeasurable difference in the lives of local veterans. We thank Sen. Serino for her undying passion for our veterans, her support of the Dwyer Vet2Vet Program and her continued achievements in Albany to educate about the program and its importance, and bring back the much-needed funds to safeguard its longevity, as well*

as Assemblymember Barrett for her continued support as Chair of the Assembly Committee on Veterans' Affairs."

**Putnam County Executive, MaryEllen Odell said,** "The Joseph P. Dwyer Vet2Vet Program is an incredibly successful program here in Putnam County and a model for peer-to-peer support for veterans throughout the state and nation. By including funding for the Vet2Vet program in her first Executive Budget Proposal, Governor Kathy Hochul would make it clear to veterans that New York State values those who stand up and sacrifice for our country."

**Anthony Kavouras, Veterans Program Director of Mental Health America Dutchess County said,** "The PFC Dwyer Grant has been an amazing benefit to every County in NY that it has been awarded to. We, here at MHA Dutchess have been able to help so many Veterans stop isolating and join with other local Veterans. The Peer Mentoring program has been able to match up so many Veterans. They feel like they have a battle buddy again. Our group sessions are very popular as well as the events we are able to put out for our Veterans and their families. I think this funding is crucial to the mental health of our Veterans. Our hope is that it continues for as long as there are Veterans that can benefit from it. The funding has never increased since it began over nine years ago. Even with that, we have been able to accomplish so much with such a relatively small amount. Please lets work together to keep the Dwyer Grant alive and well."

**Karl Rohde, Director of the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency said,** "The very nature of Dwyer Vet2Vet is that there is a universal understanding that Veterans are at their best when with other Veterans. It is absolutely critical that this program be fully funded next year."

**Gavin Walters, Director of Ulster Vet2Vet, said,** "During a national pandemic, New York added Sullivan and Ulster County under the Dwyer Program. That has shown the impact of the Dwyer Programs and how they can help our military community and their family. If the program is taken away or the programs have to fight for funding, the affects how we can help each military veteran and their family. Adding the Dwyer Program as a permanent fixture will greatly help the overall function of each of the 25 Dwyer Programs in NY State."

"I am The Director of Veterans Services for Columbia County and we have been part of the Dwyer Program for three years. I can not say enough about how much The Pfc Joseph Dwyer Program has impacted the lives of our Veterans, Families and Widows. As recent as last Friday, I had a Veteran who was admitted into the Mental Health Ward with PTSD. While he was from another County who does not have The Dwyer funding, I spent the night and all weekend working with him and he is now in the many Dwyer Programs we have. Like other Veterans this past year, we were able to most likely save his life," said **Command Sergeant Major Gary Flaherty, Columbia County Director of Veterans' Services.**

*"Having said that: It is critical that the funding for The Vital Program be 'line-itemed' and not have to be begged for each year. Further, it has been so effective, every County in the State should be a Dwyer County."*

Currently, 30 counties and New York City are home to a Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Program, named in honor of an army veteran who lost his life to PTSD. In the most recent budget, the programs were allocated a total of \$5 million dollars, which represents 0.002% of the state's overall budget, with Dutchess and Putnam counties each receiving \$185,000.

Local veterans should know that no referral is needed to utilize services offered by area Vet2Vet programs. Veterans and their loved ones looking for more information on the Vet2Vet program in Dutchess County can [click here](#) and those looking for information on available programs in Putnam County can [click here](#). Ulster County vets can [click here](#).

To [view the press conference in full](#), please [click here](#).

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