



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daphne Jordan

Senator Daphne Jordan Highlights Legislation and New Program Funding that, together, would Help Deliver Vital Mental Health Services and Support for NY'S First Responders, Veterans, Law Enforcement

DAPHNE JORDAN April 6, 2022

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HALFMOON, NY – New York State Senator Daphne Jordan (R,C,I-Halfmoon) today highlighted her legislation that would establish peer support programs for first responders and hailed the provision of state funding for a new program supporting that goal. Senator Jordan said that, taken together, the passage of the initiatives and the provision of funding would represent big victories for New York's first responders, veterans, and law enforcement.

Senator Jordan has led the fight to establish peer support programs for first responders – law enforcement, medical and EMS personnel – and has long championed the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veteran's Counseling Program (aka, the Dwyer Program), securing \$1,290,000 in state funding for the Dwyer Program operating in Columbia, Rensselaer, and Saratoga Counties, respectively. The Dwyer Program provides life-saving counseling services and support for veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Dwyer Program participants receive counseling services and support, with the program consistently highlighted as a bipartisan success with a statewide programmatic expansion expected in the final 2022-23 State Budget.

Senator Jordan sponsors Senate Bill S.2559, which would establish the Officer Ron Griffith Law Enforcement Personnel Peer Support Program for law enforcement, medical, and EMS personnel.

Senator Jordan's legislation, and the program it creates, are named for Ron Griffith, a retired NYPD Officer. During his more than two decades of service, Officer Griffith experienced many violent incidents including serving during the crime wave of the early 1980s. Officer Griffith also was a first responder on

9/11 and his experiences on that day and during search-and-rescue duty led to the development of cumulative PTSD, which he only began to address following his retirement in 2004. Officer Griffith eventually took part in stress management classes, and he recalls that only once he could vent did he understand the scope of what he was going through. In 2018, Officer Griffith took part in a video series entitled “Beneath the Vest,” which helped show the unseen costs of serving the public. Modeled on the successful Dwyer Program, Senator Jordan’s bill provides \$10,000,000 in appropriations for the support of the program that would be subject to appropriations in the annual State Budget process.

Senator Jordan also sponsors Senate Bill S.2553, which would enact the Health Care Worker Peer Support Program. Senator Jordan’s legislation is again modeled on the Dwyer Program and provides \$10,000,000 in appropriations for the support of the initiative. Going forward, the funding would be incorporated into the annual State Budget process. Senator Jordan’s bill utilizes tried-and-true solutions to mental health problems, and, if enacted, would provide peace of mind to frontline health care workers in the future.

In addition to her sponsored legislation, Senator Jordan pointed to the New York State Office of Mental Health’s recent announcement of state funding for a new initiative to strengthen resiliency and suicide prevention efforts among military veterans and uniformed personnel, including law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical service members, and corrections officers. The new program, CARES UP (Changing the Conversation, Awareness, Resilience, Empower Peers, Skills Building/Suicide Prevention for Uniformed Personnel) was developed by the New York State Office of Mental Health’s Suicide Prevention Center (OMH SPCNY) and was announced Monday. Funding for Veterans’ Agencies, with awards, includes \$210,000 for three Veteran-serving organizations including the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Program of Rensselaer County. The funding will be used to increase participation in a model national program called the Expiration of Term of Service Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP). This program assists service members and veterans as they shift from military to civilian life by connecting them with a local volunteer peer sponsor. The program focuses on the first year of post-military life, a timeframe associated with high rates of homelessness, criminal justice involvement, alcohol and substance use, unemployment, and suicide among veterans. Using peer-reviewed, evidence-based best practices, ETS Sponsors are trained and certified to build relationships and resiliency.

Additionally, the state announced on Monday that \$960,000 was awarded to 12 Uniformed Personnel organizations (including fire departments, emergency medical services, law enforcement, and corrections departments). Grant funding will support resiliency and wellness programming, as well as peer-to-peer training for grant sites, with the goal of increasing protective factors and reducing mental health problems faced by uniformed personnel. Awardees include the Clifton Park & Halfmoon Emergency Corps among other entities. OMH has also produced a CARES UP webinar series titled “First Responders Behavioral & Mental Health Wellness: Lessons from the Field” featuring Drew Anderson, Ph.D., FF/EMT, an Associate

Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York at Albany. The videos, available on the SPCNY website, explain why first responders are at an increased risk for behavioral and mental health issues. The series helps viewers understand protective factors that boost behavioral and mental wellness and can help first responders identify those around them who are struggling with mental health issues.

“Providing essential services that support, strengthen, and help the men and women who protect and serve – our communities, state, and nation – is vitally important. I’ve led the fight to establish peer support programs to assist our first responders who respond to critical crises and face deadly dangers daily. Our heroic first responders and military personnel are some of the strongest, bravest individuals in the world. However, even they need additional support to help ensure their mental health and personal wellness. Passage of my legislation, coupled with the state funding announced for the new CARES UP program, would represent big victories in responding to the needs of our first responders and veterans. I’m hopeful my legislation will be enacted before the conclusion of our Legislative Session so we can deliver additional support for individuals protecting and serving,” **Senator Daphne Jordan said.**

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