

JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARINGS

ON THE 2025/2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL

Written Testimony to

The New York State Senate Finance Committee
and
The New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee on
the Human Services Budget

Nancy J. Farrell
Director
Veterans Defense Program
New York State Defenders Association, Inc.

February 12, 2025



Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the Human Services section of the 2025/2026 Executive Budget Proposal as it relates to veterans programs. I am Nancy Farrell, the Director of the Veterans Defense Program (VDP), a statewide program of the New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA). The VDP provides assistance and expertise to attorneys and their veteran clients who suffer from the invisible wounds of war and are involved in the criminal and family court systems across the state.

I want to thank the Senate and Assembly for sponsoring the 2024/2025 Legislative add to the budget of \$500,000 for the statewide VDP (with a match of \$250,000 from the Assembly and \$250,000 from the Senate), and the Senate's sponsorship of \$220,000 for the VDP's Long Island/New York City office. The \$720,000 we received was instrumental in our ability to provide services to veterans. **This year, we are requesting restoration of the \$720,000 for the VDP in the state budget to ensure we can continue to provide crucial legal support to public defense attorneys representing veterans and peer-to-peer mentoring services.** Of the \$720,000, \$500,000 is for the statewide VDP and \$220,000 is for the VDP's Long Island/New York City office. NYSDA will also present this funding request in its budget testimony at the Public Protection hearing.

Intersection of Military Service, Mental Illness, and Criminal and Family Court Systems

Veterans returning home face indifference when suffering from a military-related mental illness and all too often do not receive timely treatment. After making tremendous sacrifices, many suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), major depressive disorder, and/or substance use disorder that negatively affect their cognitive abilities, judgment, and behavior, potentially drawing them into the criminal legal and family court systems and possibly leading to incarceration and/or loss of custody of their children.

Veterans often come into contact with these systems because they are struggling to integrate back into society while coping with these conditions. Many veterans experience one or more of the following barriers when leaving the military: difficulty securing employment because it can be difficult to translate military experience into the civilian workforce; unstable housing; social services that are hard to navigate or do not exist in their area; undiagnosed conditions or a lack of medical providers who have experience with treating veterans; and a lack of family connections and social networks outside of the military. When we overlook or ignore these unique challenges, as society often does, struggling veterans may end up being arrested, triggering a host of collateral consequences and further derailing their lives, resulting in homelessness, unemployment, estrangement from children and family members, or suicide. Veterans charged with a crime end up lost in a criminal legal system that does not address their core issues nor treat their underlying condition(s). There is no mechanism to identify veterans in the criminal legal system nor the family court system, and many are sentenced by courts that are unaware of their military experience, let alone any untreated health condition that caused or contributed to their offense.

Justice-involved veterans often do not have the funds to hire an attorney and are represented by public defenders. Public defense attorneys are rarely trained or prepared to adequately represent veterans who suffer from the invisible wounds of war, or to translate the combat experience of

their clients to explain resulting criminal behavior. Judges, prosecutors, and private criminal defense and family defense attorneys do not receive extensive training specific to veterans either. And, given that less than 7% of Americans are veterans, almost all the attorneys and judges who appear in the criminal and family courts do not have personal or family military experience to draw from in cases involving veterans.

Attorney Brock Hunter, a recognized national expert on veteran defense, summarized the situation: “We are fighting wars on the backs of volunteers and a smaller military, and we recycle the same troops back over and over, with many tours of duty. PTSD rates climb with each additional tour. The military culture is one of service and sacrifice: you deal with your problems privately and don’t complain or ask for help. Vets are badly treated and ignored in the criminal justice system. We need to give veterans support when they fall, particularly when they fall into the criminal legal system.” Defense attorneys need assistance and training to develop trauma-informed strategies for working with their veteran clients and mitigating their cases. This is exactly what the VDP provides.

The VDP’s Positive Impact

The VDP was the first program of its kind in the nation. Our goal is to ensure that each veteran has an effective advocate in New York’s criminal and family courts. The VDP is staffed with attorneys and support personnel who have deep experience and commitment to working for veterans in the criminal and family courts. Our case managers, who are all veterans, provide peer-to-peer mentoring and assistance to veterans and their families.

The VDP strives to ensure that every veteran’s story is properly presented to the court with the goal of securing veterans the treatment they need and deserve and just, trauma-informed dispositions. In many of the cases where the VDP attorneys provided substantial legal assistance, veteran clients received treatment and probation, avoiding incarceration. Our 2023 Annual Report (attached) includes examples of the VDP’s impact on individual cases. Our 2024 Annual Report showing our recent accomplishments will be available soon and will be distributed to legislators.

In addition to the direct work the VDP attorneys do with veteran clients, the VDP also trains defense attorneys in the best practices of representing veterans, including military culture and cultural competence, the effects of PTSD, TBI, and Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and trauma-informed representation. Additionally, as Veterans Treatment Courts continue to expand across New York State, the VDP is working closely with the newly formed courts and existing courts to provide training and other technical assistance to judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, mentors, coordinators, and other stakeholders.

Celebrating the 10-Year Anniversary of the Veterans Defense Program

The VDP has been providing support to veterans and their attorneys for over ten years. On May 30, 2024, the New York State Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) commemorating the VDP’s 10th Anniversary. We are grateful for the continued support from the Senate and Assembly. The VDP has assisted hundreds of veterans this past decade and saved the State millions of dollars of incarceration costs. The VDP has been very successful, and we are proud of our ongoing work on behalf of veterans.

Restoring State Funding for the VDP Helps Guarantee Justice for Veterans

Despite the services we provide to New York’s veterans, the proposed Executive Budget does not include any funding for the Veterans Defense Program. Veterans with visible and invisible military wounds need treatment and an alternative resolution process in the criminal and family legal systems. The Legislature needs to restore the \$720,000 in funding that was appropriated for the VDP in the 2024/2025 State Budget. Without restoration, the VDP will no longer be able to operate in New York.

NYSDA’s Veterans Defense Program: 2025/2026 amounts needed for restoration	
Assembly	\$250,000
Senate	\$250,000
Senate- Long Island/NYC office	\$220,000
Total	\$720,000

The VDP Strongly Supports Funding for Other Veteran Programs

The VDP has developed excellent working relationships with a large number of veteran agencies and groups across the state, including the New York State Department of Veteran Services, VA Health Administration, Veteran Justice Outreach Program offices, county Veterans Service Officers, and longstanding veterans organizations such as the Rochester Veterans Outreach Center, the Buffalo Veterans One Stop Center of Western New York, the New York State Council of Veterans’ Organizations, and Clear Path For Veterans.

We ask the Legislature to support continued funding for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer to Peer Program so that it is available to veterans in every county. We also support full funding for Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) so they can continue offering training and services, such as assistance with discharge upgrades and benefit applications, which in turn bring added federal dollars into New York.

Conclusion

The VDP is committed to giving justice-involved veterans access to the best possible legal representation and connections to needed treatment and other valuable supports. We need your help to continue our crucial work across all of New York State.

For the 2025/2026 SFY, we request restoration of the \$500,000 for the statewide VDP (with a match of \$250,000 from the Assembly and \$250,000 from the Senate), and restoration of the Senate’s sponsorship of \$220,000 for the Long Island office, which supports veterans in Nassau and Suffolk counties, as well as the five boroughs of New York City.

New York State Defenders Association
Veterans Defense Program
2023 Annual Report



DEFENDING THOSE WHO DEFENDED US

From the Directors

Dear Friends,

As we approach the tenth anniversary of NYSDA's Veterans Defense Program (VDP), we wish to convey our gratitude to everyone, including the New York State Legislature, defender programs, and local, state, and national veterans organizations, as well as the defense counsel who have graciously allowed us to assist them in their representation of veterans. All of you have been a part of the growth and success of the VDP.

It is the VDP's honor and responsibility to assist the brave men and women who have served in our military and to ensure that no veteran goes unrecognized in the criminal and family court systems, and each receives the help they have so clearly earned and need to make a successful transition home.

Veterans, who voluntarily sacrifice on our behalf, deserve our best efforts and advocacy so they receive fair and therapeutic dispositions that keep them in their communities and with their families. In the following pages, you will come to appreciate the assistance provided by the VDP, and how the program seeks to promote and contribute to the vigorous representation of our veterans and positive outcomes for them in the courts.

We look to the future with confidence that, with your ongoing support, the VDP will be able to continue to experience success in helping many more veterans in the coming years.

Sincerely,



Susan C. Bryant

NYSDA Executive Director



Nancy J. Farrell

VDP Director

Dear Colleagues,

I have been proud to serve as the Director of VDP since its founding in 2014. After ten years in this position, I have decided it is the right time for me to transition into a different role. As of the end of January 2024, Nancy Farrell has assumed the role of Director and I have taken on a new role as Special Counsel. Nancy has significant experience as a public defense attorney in criminal and family courts and has represented veterans in both courts as well as in a Veterans Treatment Court. Since joining the VDP in June of 2023, Nancy has brought new ideas and enthusiasm and is currently leading an effort to secure funding to expand the VDP's services to veterans and the defense counsel who represent them in Northern and Central New York. I am confident that the VDP will continue to grow and flourish under her leadership.

I look forward to working with Nancy and all of you as we seek to ensure all veterans and active service members involved in the criminal and family court systems are provided the recognition and opportunities their service to this country warrants.

Fondly,



Gary A. Horton, VDP Special Counsel



Mission

The Veterans Defense Program provides training, support, and legal assistance to promote trauma-informed, client-centered representation of veterans and service members involved in New York State's criminal and family courts.

Values

Teach Military Cultural Competence
Seek Therapeutic Alternatives to Incarceration
Open Access to Services
Restore Healthy Veterans to Their Families & Communities

Vision

Every justice-involved veteran receives specialized legal representation from an attorney who understands their military experience and culture and the effects of those experiences, and who can present this information to the court in support of therapeutic outcomes.

What We Do

LEGAL SERVICES



Help attorneys collect and interpret military and VA records, provide case consultations and specific military document summaries.

MITIGATION



Prepare mitigation reports based on the individual's military experience and its effects on the veteran's life, done through careful review of the veteran's military records and VA records and thorough interviews with the veteran and others.

PRISON ASSISTANCE



Assist veterans in prison with letters of commitment, VA disability forms, time credit issues, and 440 motions.

VA BENEFITS COORDINATION



Coordinate services & communication with the VA Veterans' Justice Outreach Specialists & county Veteran Service Officers on veterans' benefits.



TREATMENT

Connect veterans with PTSD, TBI, depression, and substance use disorder treatment.

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION



Provide Continuing Legal Education presentations on topics including Military Cultural Competence and Trauma-Informed Representation by the defense bar.

MENTORING & REFERRALS



Provide veteran peer-to-peer mentoring, and referrals and guidance on family and civil issues.

ACTIVE DUTY AND RESERVES



Advocate with the soldier's command and JAG officers for retention, or favorable discharge in the event of a separation board.

VDP Process



INTAKE INTERVIEW



INVESTIGATE MILITARY BACKGROUND, REQUEST RECORDS



CONDUCT IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH VETERAN CLIENT



COORDINATE VA
PTSD, TBI, AND/OR
DEPRESSION
TREATMENT IF NEEDED



COORDINATE SUBSTANCE ABUSE
TREATMENT IF NEEDED



WRITE MITIGATION MEMO AND MOTIONS



ADVOCATE FOR THERAPEUTIC ALTERNATIVES
TO INCARCERATION



RESTORATION TO FAMILY
AND COMMUNITY



VDP Impact

In 2023, the VDP helped clients avoid **124** years of incarceration, saving the State of New York over **\$14 million**.



In 2023, VDP attorneys provided Continuing Legal Education (CLE) training to **250** defense attorneys throughout New York State.

VDP attorneys completed **44** mitigations in **22** New York counties. This is an increase of **33%** over last year.

The VDP conducted nearly 40 Outreach Events in 2023, including VTC Visits, Program Presentations, and Event Tabling.

In 2023, the VDP assisted veteran clients in **41** of New York's **62** counties.



In 2023, the VDP provided extensive and nuanced legal assistance to **191** veterans and their primary attorneys. Since its start in 2014, we assisted **1,560** veterans in criminal & family court.

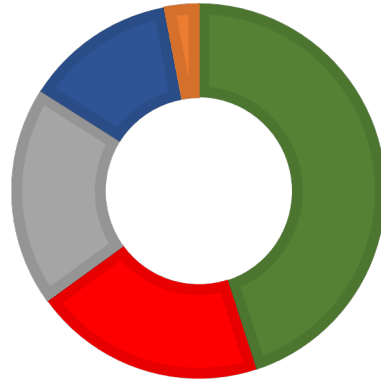
The VDP provided peer-to-peer support to over **1,050** veterans in 2023.

Over the past 7 years, the VDP has saved the State over **\$126 million**.

VDP Client Demographics

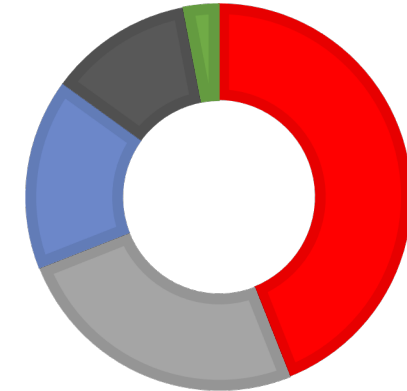
MILITARY BRANCH

- Army - 45%
- Marine Corps - 20%
- Navy - 19%
- Air Force - 13%
- Coast Guard - 3%



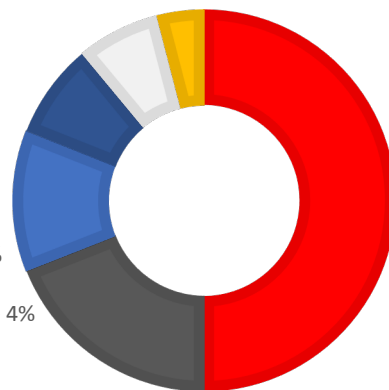
PERIOD OF SERVICE

- Post 9/11 - 44%
- Currently Serving - 25% *
- Gulf War - 16%
- Cold War - 12%
- Vietnam War - 3%



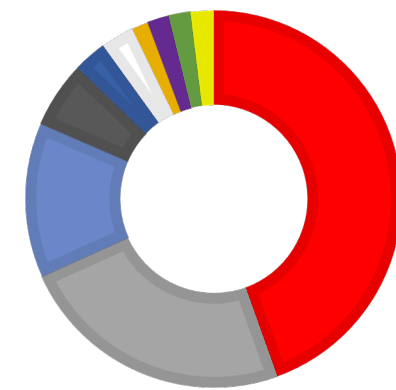
IDENTIFIED HEALTH ISSUES**

- PTSD - 50%
- Mental Health - 19%
- Other Medical Issues - 12%
- TBI - 8%
- Substance Abuse Disorder - 7%
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST) - 4%



TYPE OF CASE

- Criminal - 43%
- Info Request - 25%
- Family - 14%
- Civil - 6%
- VA Benefit Assistance - 3%
- Records Request - 3%
- Collateral Consequences - 1.5%
- SORA - 1.5%
- Federal - 1.5%
- CPL 440 Motion - 1.5%



*Active Duty Service Members including Reservists and National Guard

** 35% of our clients have a service-connected disability

VDP Case Study



United States Marine Corps Sergeant Alex Kasal* was arrested for second-degree Vehicular Assault, a Class E felony, and Driving While Intoxicated (DWI), a misdemeanor offense. After his primary attorney spent time speaking with Alex, the attorney realized his situation was not simple and contacted the VDP for assistance with this case.

Alex had joined the Marine Corps in June of 2002, shortly after graduating from high school. Serving as a Rifleman, his unit was sent to Kuwait in early 2003 for the invasion into Iraq. He experienced significant combat and was greatly impacted by the unexpected transition from invasion and chaos to low-intensity counterinsurgency before returning to the U.S. later that year. Only a few months after returning to the U.S., his unit was sent back to Iraq to join the fight in Fallujah, one of the most intense battles the Marine Corps had fought since World War II.

Honorably discharged from active duty in 2006, he was recalled from civilian life in 2008 while in the Marine Corps Reserves to return to Iraq again, this time to secure the border with Syria. In all, Alex completed three tours in Iraq and spent 22 months in the war zone, of which 15 months had been in active combat. Marines in World War II had spent less time in combat than Alex.

As a result of his experiences and trauma, the Veterans Administration awarded him a 70% service-connected disability related to the mental and emotional wounds he suffered in the line of duty. He struggled with these pains on his own and was known at work for his temper and sour mood.

When Alex was arrested, his primary attorney put him in touch with VDP Deputy Director Roy Diehl, Lt. Colonel (Ret). Roy spoke with Alex several times, offering advice and mentoring, and encouraged him to seek treatment and therapy for his mental health, something he had long avoided prior to his arrest. A comprehensive mitigation written by Roy made an impact on the court; the judge was able to recognize the relationship between Alex's service-connected disability and his arrest. Alex also earned the respect of the court by taking the initiative to get treatment. The Vehicular Assault charge was dismissed, and he pled to a DWI with no incarceration.

Perhaps more importantly, the care he received had a tremendous impact on his life. A year later, Alex was cheerful during a routine check-in phone call, and reported to Roy that he had been going to the gym and bowling with colleagues from work. Finding someone who listened and gave him the mission to get the help he needed was key in bringing this Marine out of the darkness.

*Not the client's real name

VDP Case Study



James Stryker,* a United States Marine Corps Sergeant, was arrested for Driving While Intoxicated (DWI), a misdemeanor offense. His primary attorney reached out to the VDP for assistance in resolving Sgt. Stryker's case.

James had joined the Marine Corps in February 2010, shortly after graduating from high school. Serving as a Rifleman squad leader, his unit was deployed on the Navy Ship USS Gunston Hall for nine months. On his second deployment in 2015, James was deployed to Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). While in Afghanistan, James said that every week felt like a new adjustment. He was exposed to daily fire fights and suffered an injury after an indirect explosion from an Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

During one of these fire fights, a 4-year-old child was shot and James suffered a moral injury. The term "moral injury" describes the difficulties that people face after seeing or taking part in high stakes events that violate what we know to be morally as "right and just," or after being forced to observe others' immoral actions.

After returning to the U.S., James began treatment for PTSD. He was sent to a PTSD Residential Recovery Treatment Program at the Tripler Army Medical Center, a three-month inpatient program. James completed the program and in 2016 separated from the Marine Corps with a General Discharge under Honorable Conditions. The Veterans Administration awarded him a 100% service-connected disability due to the mental and emotional wounds and trauma he experienced in the line of duty.

After James was arrested, his primary attorney connected him with VDP Attorney Elyse Sheehan. Elyse spoke with James several times, offering advice and mentoring, and she helped him understand that his physical and invisible wounds of war were not his fault and that it was normal to need support and treatment to help him heal. James participated in several treatment programs through the Veterans Administration both before and after his arrest. In February 2023, James received a letter from the Board for Correction of Military Records (BCMR) stating that they granted his requests to upgrade his discharge status to Honorable and James was additionally granted medical retirement.

The comprehensive mitigation Elyse prepared made an impact, and the court recognized the relationship between his service-connected disability and arrest. In September 2023, James was accepted into Veterans Treatment Court (VTC). He has been doing well in the VTC and recently had an ankle alcohol monitor removed. James continues weekly treatments with the VA and is seeing his private mental health professional as required by the court.

With the VDP's guidance and help, James was able to show the court his commitment to treatment and the continued need for veteran-specific services.

*Not the client's real name

VDP Peer-to-Peer Case Study



Army Specialist Jorge Vega* was referred to the VDP by a social worker from Canandaigua Veterans Administration Medical Center. Jorge had recently pled to second-degree criminal contempt but was very anxious about how the conviction would impact his pending divorce proceedings and ability to see his daughter.

Jorge was awarded a 100% service-connected disability. He was able to medically retire but suffered with PTSD and other mental health issues. Each day was a struggle.

He experienced growing anxiety, which led to multiple calls to the VDP office where he spoke with Senior Case Manager Michael White, SSgt (Ret); Case Manager and Active Army Reservist Juan Sosa; Program Coordinator Dee Quinn Miller; and Director Gary Horton, Esq.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) had approved the application of Jorge's spouse for her and Jorge's child to receive a support apportionment. This apportionment was in addition to temporary spousal and child support awarded in the divorce proceeding and reduced his monthly benefit, his only source of income, so severely that he was in jeopardy of becoming homeless.

Dee Quinn Miller worked with other VDP staff to obtain the various records needed to better serve this client. Dee worked diligently with the Canandaigua County Veterans Service Office to address the impact on Jorge's monthly compensation and was able to assist him with appeals to the VBA. As a result of this work, Jorge's full monthly service-connected disability compensation was restored. The VBA also sought recoupment of the overpayments made to his spouse. During this process, Juan Sosa was able to provide Spanish interpretation for client conferences. This greatly helped Jorge to understand the family court legal process as explained by Attorney Gary Horton, which helped to ease Jorge's anxiety and let him know he was not alone. Gary also coordinated with Jorge's divorce attorney who presented to the court documentation obtained by the VDP of the overpayment.

As a result of the VDP's involvement, Jorge has become financially stable, is no longer facing eviction, and is able to meet his financial obligations. This had been an extremely difficult time for Jorge, but the VDP's efforts greatly improved his situation, which in turn has tremendously reduced his day-to-day anxiety.

Mr. Vega stated, "I have been treated like a guilty person since the beginning of my case, the staff of the VDP did not treat me like this at all. I am very, very grateful for all that has been done to assist me. I say thanks to God for the VDP. I appreciate everything they have done for me. There were days that I didn't want to wake up, but I know with their help, better days are coming."

*Not the client's real name

Porter v. McCollum, 558 U.S. 30 (2009)

U.S. Supreme Court Ruling on Effective Assistance of Counsel for Veterans

The VDP helps public defenders fulfill their constitutional obligation to investigate their client's military service and any related mental health issues that may have contributed to their offense, and to seek mitigation. In *Porter v. McCollum, 558 U.S. 30 (2009)*, **the United States Supreme Court ruled that public defenders must adequately investigate their client's military background, including battle-borne mental health issues such as PTSD, and reasonably present such evidence in mitigation.**

Although the defendant, Porter, was a decorated Korean War veteran, his court-appointed counsel did not present evidence of his military service to the jury, and the Court reasoned this evidence might have swayed the jury. The Court concluded that counsel was ineffective.

The Supreme Court emphasized:

“Our Nation has a long tradition of according leniency to veterans in recognition of their service, especially for those who fought on the front lines as Porter did. Moreover, the relevance of Porter's extensive combat experience is not only that he served honorably under extreme hardship and gruesome conditions, but also that the jury might find mitigating the intense stress and mental and emotional toll that combat took on Porter.”

People v. Jackson, 202 A.D.3d 1483 (4th Dept 2022)

A recent decision of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Fourth Department in ***People v. Jackson, 202 A.D.3d 1483 (4th Dept 2022)***, has underscored defense counsel's obligations in representing veterans. The Appellate Division stated:

“We conclude on this record that defendant met his burden of establishing that he received less than meaningful representation. Pursuing an EED defense was the best trial strategy for defendant, and defendant demonstrated the absence of any strategic or other legitimate explanation for defense counsel's failure to obtain certain records, her failure to introduce other records in evidence, and her failure to secure an expert to support an EED defense (*see generally Oliveras, 21 N.Y.3d at 348*). We therefore reverse the order, grant the motion to vacate the judgment of conviction, and grant defendant a new trial.”

What Others Say About the VDP

Thank you Roy. God bless you. I am really emotional right now just having read your letter. I don't know how you have the insight you do but it really hits home. It's like you were there. Thank you. No matter what the court decides your letter has a great impact on me understanding my experience. Having someone put my experience into words. I can't express in words the impact reading it is having on me right now. Thank you.

U.S. Navy Veteran Client

Thank you so much again—your mitigation packet was beautiful and impressed the judge very much!

*Bailey Waltman, Esq.
The Legal Aid Society of Nassau County*

Just want to share my thanks for Michael (and your office). Phillip told me today that he was very grateful that Michael reached out because he now feels like he has someone safe and relatable to help guide him through this process. I don't know if you ever get many thanks, so I wanted to share this!

*CaliAnne Cleaves, Esq.
Ontario County Public Defender's Office*

The DA specifically noted the mitigation report you prepared in noting the offer to the court. I am quite sure that without your work, this would not have happened.... classes on weekends. If he concludes these successfully, we will get that DWAI violation. I have never had a .15% BAC reduced in Monroe County without a trial, so this is significant.

*Angelo A. Rose, Esq.
Finger Lakes Legal, Inc.*

Thank you for all the help you have provided him, he always talked about how grateful he was for y'all!

*Robert Levison, Esq.
The Legal Aid Society of
Suffolk County*

The best phone call I ever made was when I called and spoke with Michael White. After just a few moments of speaking with him, I instantly felt at ease. We were both fellow Marines so that helped. He took the time to listen to all of my concerns. Michael was kind, and very professional. He went over what I needed to do, step by step. From that day on, he was very easy to reach by phone and was very timely when responding to emails. Michael even walked me through various websites in order to get the background information he needed. Then he put me in contact with Nancy Farrell, and things really started taking off from there. I could sense her enthusiasm and willingness to do everything she could to assist me with my case. Nancy is very knowledgeable and experienced which gave me a lot of confidence.

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Client

We mostly needed to verify his veteran status. But your added context will surely help immensely. Thank you very much again for all of your assistance.

*John Vang, Esq.
The Legal Aid Society*

Praise for the VDP's Training

Overall, extremely helpful, particularly in understanding how the military culture affects the ways that clients may react to us and the legal system in general. Good practical information not lost in legal research.

Brian Leeds, Esq.
Ontario County Public
Defender's Office
10/13/23 CLE

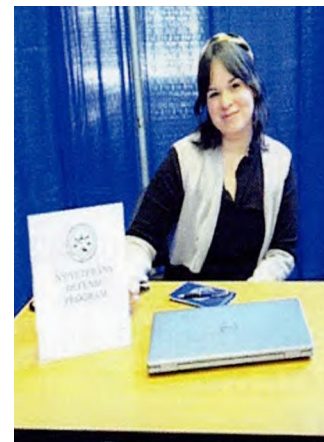


Thank you to you, Nancy, Roy and Dee for putting on the CLE for us, and to any behind the scenes assistance from other NYSDA staff. I think the content was remarkable and I just sent an email out to all our panel attorneys advising them they should first determine if their client is a veteran and, if they are, call Gary Horton immediately! From my own experience your organization's knowledge of veteran's issues and consequences far surpasses any average attorney's. Thank you for all you do for our veterans and thank you for bringing that knowledge to the bar!

Ben Bonarigo, Esq.
Genesee County Assigned
Counsel Program – Resource
Attorney
9/27/23 CLE

The entire seminar was excellent. The speakers covered separate topics thoroughly and in an interesting manner.

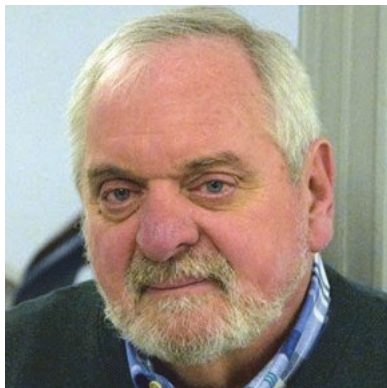
Jake Whiting, Esq.
9/27/23 CLE



The most beneficial was that there is still a huge issue with the stigma of mental health in the military. So, this served as a source to spread awareness.
Anonymous Participant, 5/19/23 CLE

This was a great training! Even though I've done other Veteran trainings I still learned a lot of new stuff. Greatly appreciated having this one!
Anonymous Participant, 10/13/23 CLE

VDP Legal Staff



Gary A. Horton
Director 2014-2023
Batavia Office

Gary A. Horton, Special Counsel with the Veterans Defense Program, has worked at NYSDA for 10 years, serving as the VDP's Director through 2023. As Special Counsel, he provides training, support, and legal assistance to justice-involved veterans and service members, and the public defense attorneys representing them. Previously, his legal practice centered on public defense for over 30 years, serving 20 years as the Public Defender of Genesee County. He served on NYSDA's Board of Directors for 12 years, including as Board Vice President. He received the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York *Special Service Award* in 2005, the NYS Bar Association Criminal Justice Section *David S. Michaels Award* in 2006, NYSDA's *Wilfred R. O'Connor Award* in 2011, the *2016 Criminal Justice Award* from the National Alliance on Mental Illness-NYS, and in 2018, the *Kutak-Dodds Prize for Outstanding Service in Public Defense* by the National Legal Aid & Defenders Association (NLADA). He has a J.D. from Hofstra University School of Law.



Nancy J. Farrell
Incoming Director 2024
Central New York

Nancy J. Farrell became Director of NYSDA's Veterans Defense Program in January 2024 after serving as a staff attorney. Prior to becoming a part of the VDP team, she practiced criminal and parental defense in Ontario County as an Assistant Public Defender and then as the Public Defender in Schuylar County. Nancy's familiarity with veterans developed during her time as the primary defense attorney in the Ontario County Veterans Treatment Court. In 2014, she started her Family Court practice at Hiscock Legal Aid Society in Syracuse, NY. She is the recipient of the 2017 NYS Bar Association *Denison Ray Defender Award* and the 2018 *Ella B. Family Justice Award* for her role in ensuring parents were represented at removal hearings. Nancy graduated from Western New England University in 2011. Nancy has been a regular CLE presenter for NYSDA since 2015.



Roy M. Diehl
Deputy Director
Albany Office

Roy M. Diehl is a seasoned Army officer who retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2015 with some 27 years of service. He has served at the Pentagon, in Iraq, and in West Germany during the Cold War. As a Judge Advocate, he represented hundreds of soldiers facing adverse personnel actions over the years, gaining enormous familiarity not only with military records but also with the real-life experience they reflect. His awards include the *Meritorious Service Medal*, *Army Commendation Medal*, *Army Achievement Medal*, *New York's Defense of Liberty Medal* and *Good Conduct Medal*, as well as *Meritorious Unit Commendation*. Roy is a 1992 graduate of Albany Law School. Since 2019, he has served as the Deputy Director of VDP.



Elyse B. Sheehan
Staff Attorney
Long Island Office

Elyse B. Sheehan graduated as an International Relations Major and Pre-Law Minor from SUNY New Paltz. She received her J.D. from Hofstra Law School. At Hofstra, she focused on Public Interest Law, interning with The Safe Center and Suffolk County Legal Aid Society's Children's Law Bureau. Throughout law school, she was a member of the Pro Bono Scholar Program and was placed at Nassau/Suffolk Law Service's Domestic Violence Project, providing legal representation to victims of domestic violence in Suffolk County. During law school she also worked as a Legislative Reporter for Assemblyman Felix Ortiz. Prior to joining the VDP, she was a Staff Attorney with the Suffolk County Legal Aid Society's District Courts Criminal Division, safeguarding the rights of clients and assuring equal access to criminal justice.

VDP Program Staff



Deanne Quinn Miller
Program Coordinator
Batavia Office

Deanne (Dee) Quinn Miller assists with trainings and expert referrals, provides mentoring, and navigates the VA and Department of Defense systems to obtain military records for veteran cases. She has extensive knowledge of veteran issues and benefits. Previously, she was Executive Director of the Genesee Veterans Support Network. She received the VA of Western New York's *Women Veterans Justice System Award* in 2016, and a *Women of Distinction Award* in 2017 for her work with veterans. She is Director of the Forgotten Victims of Attica and recently completed her memoir, *The Prison Guard's Daughter, My Journey through the Ashes of Attica*.



Michael White
Senior Case Manager
Batavia Office

Michael White mentors veteran clients by providing guidance, support, and expert referrals, as well as support to the VDP legal staff in the Batavia, Albany, and Long Island offices. He retired from the Marine Corps as a Staff Sergeant in 2014 with 22 years of military experience, including deployments to Haiti, the Philippines, Korea, and Afghanistan. He has extensive firsthand knowledge of military culture and the many issues that veterans face, as well as VA health and education benefits. He has an Associate Degree in Human Services and a B.A. in Health and Human Services Community Mental Health.



Juan Sosa
Case Manager
Long Island Office

Juan Sosa mentors veteran clients by providing guidance, support, and expert referrals, as well as support to the VDP legal staff in the Long Island office. He has a Biology degree from Mercy College. In 1993, he joined the U.S. Army Reserves as a Motor Transport Operator and deployed to Iraq twice, in 2002-03 and 2006-07. He has extensive firsthand knowledge of military culture and the many issues that veterans face. In September of 2022, Juan was called up to EUCOM Command and stationed in Stuttgart Germany for 10 months. He returned to the VDP in June 2023. He is currently a Sergeant First Class with the 301st Information Operations Battalion and is credited with over 30 years of service.



Amanda Luce
Case Manager
Batavia Office

Amanda Luce mentors veteran clients by providing guidance, support, and expert referrals, as well as support to the VDP legal staff in the Batavia and Long Island offices. Amanda served in the U.S. Air Force from 2003-2009 as a Nondestructive Inspection Journeyman on military aircraft and deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 for six months. She discharged as a Staff Sergeant. She has extensive firsthand knowledge of military culture and the many issues that veterans face, especially female veterans, as well as VA health and education benefits. It has been her goal to assist other veterans.

Thank You to Our Supporters

Special thanks to the NYS Legislature's budget appropriations for the VDP in the FY 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 State Budgets. Special thanks to NYS Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton, Chair of the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs Committee; NYS Assemblymember Kimberly Jean-Pierre, Chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee; NYS Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins; and NYS Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie. Thanks also to the strong support of many other state legislators, especially many members of the NYS Senate and Assembly Veterans, Codes, Crime and Corrections, Finance, Health, Judiciary, and Ways & Means committees.



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