

# Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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## **Senator Helming, Leader Ortt, Congressman Zeldin: Restore Funding for Critical Veterans Program**

As the April 1 state budget deadline nears, Senator Pam Helming and Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt joined Congressman Lee Zeldin in Albany this week to call on Governor Cuomo to restore funding for the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Support Program. The Dwyer Program provides essential peer-to-peer mental health support to veterans across New York State.

**Senator Pam Helming said**, “Whether they served in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere abroad or at home during their military careers, our veterans deserve our utmost respect and support. They leave their homes and families and put their lives on the line to defend our freedoms, protect our way of life, and keep our nation safe. We as a government and as a community must do all we can to support and care for our veterans. With an estimated 22 veterans dying by suicide each day across our country, it would be an understatement to say that any cuts to veterans programs would be devastating.”

The Governor’s budget proposal this year left out the Dwyer Program entirely. The State Senate Majority’s one-house budget bill proposes \$4.5 million for the Dwyer Program, the same funding approved last year. In contrast, the State Assembly Majority’s one-house bill proposes \$6.05 million. Helming and her Senate Republican colleagues are advocating for adoption of the Assembly’s funding proposal.

**Senator Rob Ortt, a NY Army National Guard veteran who served in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan said**, “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 never been more important, and they should be made permanent. We cannot forget that our veterans are a valued community that have served their country and deserve this and more.”

Joseph P. Dwyer was a U.S. Army combat medic in the Iraq War who was portrayed in an iconic photo carrying a young Iraqi boy away from danger. After PFC Dwyer's return home from service, he struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Congressman Lee Zeldin was instrumental in the creation of the Dwyer Program during his time as a New York State Senator.

**Congressman Lee Zeldin, a U.S. Army veteran who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom said,** "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."

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