

Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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A COLUMN FROM STATE SENATOR PAM HELMING

Successes of the 2021 Legislative Session

If your loved one was in a life-threatening accident, you'd want to know that everything possible was being done to save his or her life. Under an arcane law, New York is the only state that does not allow medical flight crews to carry or distribute blood during emergencies. But thanks to legislation I co-sponsored that passed the Senate and Assembly, that will change.

If the Governor signs it, air ambulances, like Mercy Flight Central, will be able to administer blood transfusions to patients on helicopters and help save more lives. Thank you to Jeff Bartkoski, President and CEO of Mercy Flight Central, and his team for their leadership and advocacy on this bill.

One of the major successes of this legislative session was Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery being named the first New York State Veterans Cemetery. Credit goes to our local veterans and their families and advocates who fought for this designation alongside Seneca County officials and Senator Mike Nozzolio. When I took office in 2017, some of the earliest calls I received were from veterans asking me to continue Senator Nozzolio's work on Sampson. It has been my honor to do so.

Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery will continue to proudly serve as a lasting memorial and hallowed resting place for our nation's greatest heroes.

Fighting for our veterans has always been one of my top priorities. Another bill I sponsored that passed the Senate and Assembly will help improve the reporting of veteran deaths by suicide. I urge the Governor to sign it.

Special thanks to Wayne Thompson and the Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council for their instrumental work on this legislation. Each day, 22 veterans die by suicide. With lifesaving resources like the Veterans Crisis Line at the Canandaigua VA, and informed data, we can hopefully help more veterans.

Earlier this year, another veterans bill I co-sponsored was signed into law. It expands access to veterans treatment courts to ensure that veterans with PTSD, depression and other challenges receive the support they need when they return from service.

For our agriculture industry, I was proud to co-sponsor legislation to make the Nourish New York program permanent. This important initiative supports our hardworking farmers and helps get healthy, locally grown food on family tables through area food banks like Foodlink, the Food Bank of Central New York, and Food Bank of the Southern Tier. Again, I urge the Governor to sign the bill into law.

Two of my bills that passed the Senate have been sent to the Assembly. One would help boost volunteer firefighter recruitment by allowing student volunteers to safely observe an active emergency or hazardous response. The other would create the Rural Suicide Prevention Council to address the higher rates of suicide in rural counties.

Success is also about what didn't get done. Thanks to many of you who signed my petition, the climate bill that would have resulted in higher gas taxes for every New Yorker failed to come before the Senate for a vote. In addition, we were able to stop the Governor's proposed overhaul of the New York State Canal System and protect our local canal communities and businesses.

Though the legislative session has ended, work continues on many important issues, including the full reopening of our schools in September. I will continue to push the state to end the mask mandate on our schoolchildren and return local control to our school districts and parents.

I am so happy to be back in the district full-time and I hope to see you soon. As always, please reach out if I can be of assistance.

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Pam Helming represents the 54th District in the New York State Senate.