



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian X. Foley

Standing up for Veterans: Sen. Foley Announces Major Initiatives to Help New York State's Veterans

BRIAN X. FOLEY June 3, 2009

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Senator Brian X. Foley (D – Blue Point) announced two major initiatives that will help veterans returning to New York State from tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Foley is sponsoring legislation that will help veterans reclaim homes lost to foreclosures. The legislation (S4025-B) allows local governments to waive penalties, interests payments, and fees that are owed by military personnel or their spouses on houses they have lost due to foreclosures. While there are federal statutes barring banks from foreclosing on service men

and women on active duty, the Foley legislation allows veterans to redeem their homes within three years of foreclosure, provided there is no other family occupying it.

“Our veterans risk their lives to guarantee our freedom, the least we can do is make sure they have homes to come back to,” said Foley. “I am proud to sponsor this legislation and help veterans reclaim homes they’ve lost while serving our country.”

The legislation – which is sponsored in the Assembly(A8607A) by Assemblyman Espaillat – applies to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who have served at least six months abroad. It is expected to be passed in the Senate next week.

“I thank Senator Foley for sponsoring this legislation because we have a duty to do everything we can to insure that our servicemen and women have a home to return to after they risk their lives overseas to protect our freedoms,” said Suffolk County Legislature Presiding Officer William J. Lindsay. “There could be no greater injustice than a returning hero losing a home to foreclosure.”

“The courageous individuals who serve our nation abroad should never have to worry about losing their homes while they are on duty or once they return,” said Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith. “This legislation improves the current statute, which protects homes from foreclosure while military personnel are serving, to safeguard their homes for an additional three years once they return to New York. This will ease the transition process for veterans, and ensure that they are given the assistance needed to preserve their homes after serving our nation so bravely.”

The new law – which is known as the “Veterans Home Redemption and Relief Act” – will help veterans who lost their homes due to financial hardship incurred during their service. It will also apply to spouses of deceased service men and women.

In addition to the “Veterans Home Redemption and Relief Act,” Foley announced that he will be working with the New York State Division of Veterans’ Affairs to help make New York’s veterans aware of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and to begin making the State’s college campuses more veteran-friendly.

The United States Department of Veterans' Affairs began accepting and processing applications for the new GI Bill on May 1, 2009. It will begin processing payments under the new program on August 1, 2009.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill includes a number of key enhancements over the Montgomery GI Bill, such as:

- A monthly housing allowance to allow veterans to dedicate more time and energy to studies.
- A books and supplies stipend to assist in the high cost of attending school for student veterans.
- A program which will allow more expensive schools to enter into an agreement with the VA to assist in covering costs of remaining tuition.

"We have a responsibility to our veterans to make sure they are able to access all of the benefits they are entitled to as a result of their service," said Senator Foley. "This includes making them aware of the new educational benefits that are available under the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and making available veterans counselors to help them determine which benefit program will best meet their educational needs. We also must also do more to ensure that our college campuses are providing a welcoming environment for our veterans to attend classes and participate in campus life."

"With this new benefit comes the responsibility for our schools to become more veteran-friendly, to help reduce student veteran attrition rates and foster a welcome atmosphere on campus," said James McDonough, New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs Director. "With more veterans returning to campus using Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, schools can expect to see their student veterans' financial needs more closely met than at any other time in recent history. In light of reported dwindling endowments, eligible veterans will walk on campus with their own financial aid package; it just makes sense for our campuses to become more veteran-friendly, given the economic incentive to do so."

To help eligible veterans understand the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs will launch a tuition calculator on its web site. This calculator will allow

eligible veterans, as well as educational institutions, to calculate the approximate value of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. This tuition calculator will also be able to factor in New York State's Veterans Tuition Award (VTA). The State VTA may provide veterans using the Post 9/11 GI Bill with financial assistance to offset remaining tuition and fees.

According to information provided by the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs, schools can expect to see a twenty percent increase in the number of veterans going to school in the next two to three years.

In the coming months, Senator Foley and the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs will be hosting a regional veteran-friendly campus forum with local college presidents to help inform schools of changes in veteran education benefits and programs. This forum will also provide college presidents with information on how their campuses can become more veteran-friendly.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill will help more than 1.8 million veterans nationwide who served since September 11, 2001. Veterans interested in applying for the Post 9/11 GI Bill are encouraged to apply online at the United State Department of Veterans' Affairs application center at <http://vabenefits.vba.gov/vonapp/main.asp> or by locating or calling the nearest New York State Veterans Counselor at http://www.veterans.state.ny.us/counselor_location.html or by calling 1-888-VETSNYS (1-888-838-7697).

These links may also be accessed by visiting Senator Foley's website at <http://www.nysenate.gov/senator/brian-x-foley>.

For more information, please contact us at sd3info@gmail.com or by phone at 631-360-3365 (3356).