



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Addabbo Participates in State Senate Hill Day to Honor Veterans

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr

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Seven Bills Pass Senate to Protect Property, Rights, Services Available to Current/Former Military Members and Senate Passes Bill to Limit Protests at Military Funerals

Queens, NY, March 22, 2011 – NYS Senator Joseph Addabbo, Jr. (D-Queens), ranking member of the Senate's Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs Committee, voted for a package of legislation that passed the Senate last week, which would significantly enhance the protection of property, rights and services available to current and former military personnel. The seven bills, part of the Senate Veteran Hill Day, would build upon the Senate's ongoing commitment to increase support for veterans and their families. Hill Day honored

veterans across the state by acknowledging their service and addressing military-related issues at public legislative meetings and hearings.

As part of the package, Addabbo supported a bill that he stated was a popular issue among veterans--legislation that would limit protests at military funerals. Called "The Specialist Thomas Wilwerth Military Dignity Act," the proposed law is named for an Iraq War veteran from Long Island who lost his life in combat in 2006. All bills now await passage by the Assembly, before going to Governor Cuomo for signature.

The veterans' legislative package of seven bills included:

- Bill S.2421 would require that absentee or military ballots of any active duty service member be counted even if such service member dies before the date of the election for which it was cast.
- Bill S.2424A establishes the New York State Veterans Cemetery Act and provides the mechanism for the establishment of a New York State Veterans Cemetery Program.
- Bill S.3484 extends provisions establishing a recruitment incentive and retention program in the form of a tuition reimbursement for certain active members of the New York Army National Guard, Air National Guard and Naval Militia.
- Bill S.1728 would create the crime of "Cemetery Desecration of a Veteran" and also allows community service to be provided for desecrated cemeteries as a condition for probation or conditional release.
- Bill S.1504 would prohibit the unauthorized sale of veterans' commemorative property, including artifacts, statues or other physical memorabilia from a cemetery, in order to preserve history and provide for the continued reverence of those who faithfully served our country.

- Bill S.1431 directs the Adjutant General to present a U.S. flag to the person disposing of the body of a member of the National Guard, Air National Guard or a Naval Militia who dies in the service of their state and nation; and

- Bill S.656 allows the State Department of Environmental Conservation to organize fishing events that provide physical or emotional rehabilitation for veterans or active duty members of the armed forces, without the need for veterans or active duty members to obtain fishing licenses.

These bills are in addition to Bill S.3901 that would limit protests and help prevent disruptions at military funerals.

This bill prohibits protests within 2,500 feet of military services, funerals and processions of deceased service members, unless the protest organizers post a bond to the local municipality to defray the increased security costs associated with demonstrations that occur closer to these funeral activities. In no case would protestors be permitted within 500 feet of funeral activities and they would also have to apply for a permit with the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs under this measure.

Senator Addabbo noted, “We should show our appreciation to veterans not only on Veterans Day, but each day of the year.

These bills reflect only some of the challenges that are facing service men and women while in active duty and after they have returned home.” Addabbo said that by advancing these bills, the legislature would ensure that military votes will be counted, veteran’s cemeteries will be protected and the educational and rehabilitative support will continue as individuals transition from active service back to the community.

Hill Day in Albany included a hearing by the Senate’s Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs Committee, chaired by Sen. Greg Ball (R-Brewster) that heard from numerous veterans who testified about the issues that concern them.

Addabbo recognized the growing population of veterans and the need to protect their health concerns and the St. Albans VA Hospital. He believes that New York State should continue providing necessary funding and disagrees with Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposed 10 percent cut to each of the five outstanding New York State veterans homes, including St. Albans in Queens. Testimony ranged from the diminishing services at VA hospitals, to the effects of Agent Orange and the need for services for Agent Orange veterans, to post-traumatic stress disorder that returning veterans suffer, to ideas on how to improve veteran outreach and build awareness of veteran support programs. Another topic discussed was the reentering of our veterans back into society. Many veterans suffer bouts of post-traumatic stress disorder when they return home and are unable to access entitled benefits due to administrative oversight and lack of information.

Fred Schwally, Vietnam veteran and National Commander of the National Catholic Board of Veterans, stated that service breaks an individual down, turns them into a war machine and provides lack of guidance when a member reenters society. "There is no exit strategy when you come out of service. You are not told about your benefits, or how to reenter society. Decisions are left up to you to seek assistance," said Mr. Schwally. Jim McDonough, former Director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, explained New York State should provide educational opportunities for returning veterans to ease their reentry. An approximate 444,000 returning veterans have sought to further their education.

"We are preserving their legacy and reaffirming our commitment to help those who put their lives on the line for our freedoms. We are also protecting the right of military families to bury their loved ones in peace and dignity," Addabbo concluded.

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