



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

Grisanti and fellow senators speak out for veterans at mental health rally

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Advocating for mental health services for veterans, Senator Lee M. Zeldin (R-C-I, Shirley) today addressed the Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) at the Association's annual legislative lobby day rally in Albany. The gathering of more than 300 mental health experts, advocates and family members, also included dozens of veterans from Suffolk and Nassau Counties.

Senator Zeldin spoke about the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Veterans Counseling program, a program he helped establish last year in four test counties (Suffolk, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Jefferson) which provides "peer-to-peer" counseling between veterans who personally understand the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Citing federal Veterans Administration statistics which show that up to 20 percent of Iraq and Afghan war veterans, 10 percent of Gulf War (Desert Storm), and 30 percent of Vietnam veterans experience PTSD, Senator Zeldin called for an immediate expansion of the Dwyer program so that veterans in other regions of the state can receive this service. Specifically, the Senator has proposed expanding the program to Erie, Nassau, Onondaga, Orange, Putnam and Rockland Counties.

“The counseling is free of charge and provided to veterans from other veterans who know exactly what it’s like to cope with and overcome the psychological trauma experienced during intense armed conflict,” said Senator Zeldin, a Major in the U.S. Army Reserves. “Countless veterans have already benefitted from this excellent program and now we want as many other veterans as possible to receive this service. For our troops coming home from the Middle East and struggling to make the adjustment back into day-to-day life, and for those who served long ago and still suffer the deep effects of combat and loss, we want them to know that they can lean on others who have been experiencing similar issues.”

Also joining Senator Zeldin at the rally were Senator Kathleen A. Marchione, representing Saratoga and Rensselaer Counties; Senator Patricia A. Ritchie, representing Jefferson County; and Senator David Carlucci, Chairman of the Senate Mental Health Committee.

“Thousands of New York veterans are living with the invisible wounds of battle, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI),” said Senator Kathleen A. Marchione (R,C-Halfmoon).

Senator Mark J. Grisanti (R,I-60) said, “Since the founding of this great country, our veterans have been the backbone for our freedoms. In this day, we now know more about the physical and especially the mental toll serving in our Armed Forces has on the individual. When our veterans return home we need programs like the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer to Peer Counseling Program set up in our counties to ensure that every veteran who needs access to help has that access as readily available as possible.”