



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Flanagan

Senator Flanagan Joins Senator Zeldin To Announce Expanded Funding Of PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program

JOHN J. FLANAGAN April 15, 2013

| ISSUE: **VETERANS**

Senator John Flanagan (2nd Senate District) recently joined with Senator Lee M. Zeldin (3rd Senate District) and his other colleagues in the State Senate to announce that funding for the continuation and expansion of the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Veterans Counseling program has been included in the recently approved 2013-14 state budget.

Initiated by Senator Zeldin, the program provides “peer-to-peer” counseling for veterans suffering from the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Since its inception last year, the program has been assisting veterans in four test counties: Suffolk, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Jefferson.

The counseling available through the program is free of charge and provided to participating veterans by fellow veterans who understand coping with and overcoming the psychological trauma experienced during intense armed conflict. The veterans offering the counseling are trained and guided by professional therapists and facilitators and are dedicated to helping their fellow veterans make the necessary adjustments back to day-to-day life.

At Senator Zeldin's request, funding for this innovative direct counseling program was expanded from \$800,000 in the 2012-13 State Budget to \$2.3 million in the recently approved budget. This funding will allow the program to continue in Suffolk County and the other test counties while also expanding to seven additional counties including Nassau County.

PFC Joseph Dwyer was a New Yorker and one of the brave men and women who answered our country's call after the attacks of September 11, 2001. He served with courage and honor in Iraq, but returned home with PTSD. On June 28, 2008, the illness took his life, leaving behind his wife, Matina, and their two-year-old daughter, Meagan.

"This is a huge win for our veterans," said Senator Zeldin, a Major in the U.S. Army Reserves. "Countless veterans have already benefitted from this excellent program and now even more will have access to this service. I want to thank all of my Senate colleagues who joined me in the fight to ensure that this critical funding was included in this year's state budget. Their support was instrumental in this effort and will greatly assist our troops who have served our country honorably and are now struggling to make the adjustment back into day-to-day life."

"Our brave veterans have sacrificed their families and lives to protect our freedoms," stated Senator Flanagan. "We owe them a debt of gratitude and support upon their return from serving this great country. I want to thank Senator Zeldin for his constant efforts on behalf of all New York veterans, and join him in supporting the continuation and expansion of this critically important peer counseling program. The program has already proven to be a great success for so many Suffolk County veterans by easing their transition from military to civilian life. Now the program will be available to even more of our military heroes throughout New York State."

Senate Republican Leader Dean G. Skelos (R, Rockville Centre) said, “As New York’s veterans worked courageously to protect our freedom, many have faced physical and mental traumas that will last with them long after they return home. The expansion of the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Counseling Program will provide an outlet for Nassau’s veterans to share their experience and facilitate healing so that our bravest service members can receive the understanding and care they deserve.”

Federal Veterans Administration statistics 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.

Any veteran who wishes to participate in the program should contact Suffolk County Veterans’ Services Department by calling 631-853-8345 or by emailing vetspeertopeer@suffolkcountyny.gov.