



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lee M. Zeldin

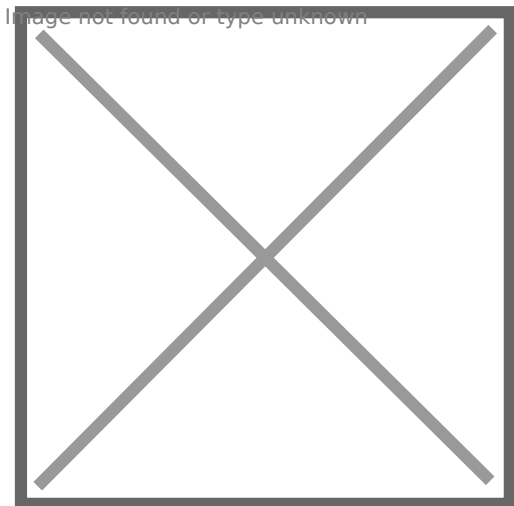
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ISSUE:

- [Military Affairs](#)
- [Military](#)
- [Veterans](#)



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Senator Lee Zeldin Announces Budget Win for PFC Joseph Dwyer Program

PATCHOGUE—Senator Lee Zeldin (R,C,I—Shirley) announced today that the 2014-2015 state budget includes funding for the continuation and expansion of one of his most significant legislative achievements to date: the PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-to-Peer Veterans Support program.

Created as part of the 2012-2013 state budget, this program aims to bring veterans together in a secure, anonymous setting in order to help one another cope with the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

PTSD is a mental health condition characterized by severe anxiety that can plague an individual with relentless symptoms, including flashbacks and uncontrollable thoughts of past traumatic events. The program was originally designed with six goals in mind:

- Pursue outreach and education
- Provide peer support
- Build resiliency among peers
- Encourage a connection among family, friends, and community

- Provide access to suicide prevention/intervention initiatives; and
- Foster hope

The program's unique Vet-to-Vet approach has provided proper support and guidance to veterans struggling to readjust to life back home, worked to prevent the long term effects of PTSD, and most importantly, saved lives.

"The Dwyer Program is named for PFC Joseph Dwyer, a war hero who, despite the support of a loving family, passed away due to complications from PTSD upon his return from service in Iraq," said Senator Zeldin, a veteran and current Major in the Army Reserves.

"It is not always easy for family and friends to understand the demons haunting some of our soldiers when they return from combat. The value of the Dwyer Program lies in the unique Vet-to-Vet approach that connects our returning soldiers with those who can relate and who can draw from their own experiences to help one another cope."

Jeff McQueen, Program Coordinator/PFC Dwyer Vet2Vet noted, "Vet2Vet is a powerful tool reproducing the camaraderie of the military in civilian life...it has given me a chance to give and get support to my brothers and sisters."

Ava Davis, Air Force OEF / OIF Veteran who attended the Vet2Vet groups in Nassau agreed, saying, "The support of Vet2Vet lets me know I'm not alone and has been the turning point in my life."

Along with his budget announcement, Senator Zeldin also released a report detailing the success of the original Dwyer Pilot Program in Suffolk County. The report shows that since its inception in January of 2013 through November of that same year, the Suffolk County program had conducted **148 group sessions** and had **served 450 veterans**.

"The Dwyer Program is a budget victory that I am especially proud of," Senator Zeldin continued. "It has proven to be incredibly successful in my home county of Suffolk, which boasts the largest population of veterans in New York. Each and every session that the program provides is an opportunity to help someone who voluntarily sacrificed their physical and mental well-being to uphold our freedoms and liberties."

Given the success of the Suffolk pilot, Senator Zeldin continued to fight for the Program's expansion. With the addition of Monroe County in this year's budget, twelve counties are now in the process of establishing their own programs. They include: Nassau, Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Jefferson, and Onondaga.

Tom Ronayne, Director of the Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency said, "Suffolk County has been extraordinarily fortunate to be one of the founding counties of the program. With the support of Senator Zeldin, this program has grown from one county to 12, and most importantly, this program, named in Joe's honor, is saving lives every day."

Brian Dwyer, brother of PFC Joseph Dwyer, echoed that sentiment in saying, "When we first started talking about the program, we thought—if it could help even one person, it's worth it. To see how many people have actually been helped is overwhelming. We're thankful that out of our tragedy, so much good has come and so many have been helped."

Village of Patchogue Mayor, Paul Pontieri, added, "We should never take lightly sacrifices of the men and woman of our military. We can never do enough to thank our Veterans for their service to Country. The Dwyer program is in a small way helping to fulfill our obligation to take care of the Veterans as they have taken care of us."

Senator Zeldin concluded by thanking all of those who have remained dedicated to making the program a success.

For more information regarding the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans PTSD Peer Support Project, please visit:

http://www.scuv.org/joseph_p_dwyer_veterans_ptsd_peer_support_project_food_pantrieswHE