



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Senate Passes Package of Bills to Protect, Assist, and Honor Current and Former Military Service Members

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ALBANY, 05/23/17 -- State Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I/Ref – Oneonta) today announced senate passage of legislation aimed at caring for and memorializing the courageous men and women who have served in our military, as well as those still serving today. The legislative package will safeguard the welfare of those who protect our lives, ease their fiscal burdens, help them leverage crucial benefits, and honor their service to our country.

“The brave service men and women who have sacrificed so much to keep New York and our families safe are deserving of our everlasting respect and support,” said Senator Seward. **“This comprehensive package of bills is part of the senate’s ongoing commitment to stand with our veterans and active duty military members and help where possible. Thank you for protecting our freedoms and our way of life.”**

Protecting our Service Members:

· **Increasing Penalties for Violence against Active Duty and Reserve Military Members:** Bill S.927 establishes a class D felony for the crime of inciting violence against both active duty and reserve military service members in an effort to curb the destructive trend of targeting those who have made a career out of protecting the citizens of this country. Bill S.955 makes it a class C felony to commit assault against an active-duty soldier if the accused’s intent was to prevent that soldier from performing their lawful duty.

Making it More Affordable to Live in New York:

- **Establishing a Task Force on Veteran Employment Opportunities:** Bill S.936 creates a task force to study and improve the job market for veterans. The task force, to be made up of stakeholders within state government, the private sector, and institutions of higher education, will be charged with holding annual public hearings and making recommendations to the legislature regarding ways the state can assist those who served our country in finding and maintaining meaningful employment opportunities;
- **Helping Veterans Afford a Home:** Bill S.5158 assists service-related disabled veterans in affording a home by giving those with a VA disability rating of 40 percent or higher a preference in applications to the state's Affordable Home Ownership Development Program;
- **Assisting More Veterans in Applying for Public Housing:** Bill S.1482 expands eligibility for veterans in public housing to include those of recent conflicts, and requires granting of a preference for public housing to veterans or families of veterans who have a military service connected disability;
- **Providing Tax Relief to Reservists Called to Active Duty:** Bill S.959 allows municipalities to offer the alternative veterans' property tax exemption to members of the military who are currently serving on active duty. Under current law, individuals who are in active military service need to wait until their service in uniform is finished in order to receive the tax benefits extended by participating municipalities;
- **Providing Tax Relief to Reservists Called to Active Duty:** Bill S.2520A allows the governing body of a city, village, town, or county to exempt reservists called to active duty from property taxes. The exemption, which would span the time of active duty, would ease the financial burden that reservists and their families often face when they are called upon to serve;
- **Extending Property Tax Exemptions to Certain Reservist Veterans:** Bill S.5411 permits towns to offer reserve military veterans who participated in Operation Graphic Hand the alternative veteran property tax exemption.

Connecting Service Members and Veterans with Important Services for them and their Families:

- **Ensuring Continuity of Care for Service Members' Families:** Bill S.5807 ensures that service members who have dependent family members with developmental disabilities continue to receive services from the state without interruption to guarantee better continuity of care and better outcomes for the individual;
- **Giving All Active Duty Members of the Military Greater Access to State Parks:** Bill S.3571 streamlines the process for active duty service members to receive their free Empire Passport for state park usage. Current law requires the Empire Passport to be filled out annually and to be received in the mail, making the entire process lengthy and cumbersome. Active duty service members and their immediate family would instead be eligible for the free pass by providing their military ID upon entry;
- **Simplifying the Process for Military Personnel to be Married:** Bill S.1013 authorizes military personnel scheduled for deployment in less than 30 days to get married within 24 hours of receiving their marriage license. Currently the mandatory waiting period of 24 hours for couples to get married is a hindrance to those expected to serve our country overseas and on short notice;
- **Expand Opportunities and Services Available to Service-Disabled Veterans:** Bill S.2424B directs the State Division of Veterans' Affairs to develop a plan for a comprehensive statewide program of coordinated services for service-disabled veterans. The plan would include: educational training and retraining services and facilities; health, medical, and rehabilitation services; employment and re-employment services; housing options; transportation options; long-term care options; personal care; day program service options; family outreach; and other essential services that maximize existing resources.

Showing Respect for and Recognition of Military Personnel:

- **Increasing Availability to Financial Relief for Blind Veterans:** Bill S.200 provides an increase in the base rates of annuities payable to blind veterans and surviving spouses of blind veterans from \$1,000 to \$1,500. It also clarifies the formula for annual increases to take into account the latest federal increase for veterans' annuities;
- **Commemorating the Service of Veterans with Personalized License Plates:** Bill S.4464 authorizes the issuance of distinctive license plates for veterans

while also exempting them from the one-time service and annual registration fees to keep their license plates updated.

The bills have been sent to the assembly.

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