



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

## **Senators Murphy, Serino, Assemblyman Byrne announce \$185,000 in funding for veteran's Peer-To-Peer Program**

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Carmel, NY - Many Americans spent this past Memorial Day weekend in remembrance of our fallen heroes and in appreciation of our warriors who were able to come home. Unfortunately, too many of our enlisted men and women now suffer lasting effects from their wartime service. Having spoken with veterans in VA hospitals and in the community, Senator Terrence Murphy sought funding to help assist those affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Flanked by Senator Sue Serino and Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Carmel Post 1374 in Carmel, Senator Murphy announced today that he had secured \$185,000 in funding for the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Services Program in Putnam County. Among the elected officials, agency representatives and guests on hand in a show of support for our veterans were Assemblyman Kevin Byrne; Putnam County Sheriff Don Smith; Maureen Fleming, Supervisor for the Town of Kent; Michael Bartolotti, Putnam County Clerk; Megan Castellano, Executive Director for the Mental Health Association in Putnam County, Inc.; Karl Rhode, Director for the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency; Art Hanley, Deputy Director for the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency, and John Bourges, Program Coordinator for the PFC Joseph Dwyer Veteran Outreach of Putnam County. "According to statistics, twenty veterans commit suicide every day. The Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program has provided support to veterans and most importantly, saved lives," said Senator Murphy. "The program offers veterans an opportunity to support one another, to listen and benefit from each other's experiences. A veteran many be able to help a returning veteran readjust to civilian life, return to school, land a job or obtain and services they may need." Senator Sue Serino said, "We have a responsibility to do right by our veterans who selflessly

signed up to serve, and a duty to acknowledge that the responsibility does not end when their contracted service does. The Dwyer Program builds on the military's long tradition of camaraderie and brings heroes together to help other heroes in an effort to ensure that they have the tools they need to live their lives to the fullest. I was proud to once again advocate for this critical funding, and I thank all of those involved here in Putnam for their commitment to its success. To our veterans, know that you are not alone and that you have an incredibly grateful community behind you always." "Looking out today at the Putnam County Row of Honor, we are reminded of the importance of funding programs that will help our veterans and their families as they return to civilian life," said Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell. "All of the proceeds from this year's Row of Honor are being used for suicide prevention through the efforts of the Peer-to-Peer Program. For many of our veterans, the battlefield follows them home. We here in Putnam County take great pride in the team of support providers that work shoulder to shoulder to address issues such as PTSD and suicide prevention. Thank you, Senator Murphy, for your efforts. Our veterans have served our nation with honor, now it is our turn to serve them." Assemblyman Kevin Byrne commented, "The traditional medical model - in an office with the door closed - is the last thing most veterans want. Often, veterans reaching out to other veterans is the key to showing them that it is okay to ask for help," said Assemblyman Byrne. "This is well conceived, expertly administered program that will continue to have a positive impact on a countless number of lives." "We have always known about the physical scars of war. We have taken the scars that PTSD and TBI leave behind for granted for far too long," said Putnam County Sheriff Don Smith. "This program brings people together. It gives our veterans hope. I think it is important that we remember that freedom is not free. We should never forget what our veterans have done for us." Statistics show that as many as 20% of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, 10% of Gulf War and 30% of Vietnam veterans experience PTSD. As a result, the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program was founded in Putnam County in 2013. The program is run for veterans by veterans, providing peer-to-peer counseling between veterans who personally understand the effects of PTSD and TBI. The program is available for all of the nearly 9,000 veterans in the county. The Program is named for an Army medic from New York who enlisted following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. PFC Dwyer was deployed with his unit to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. During their combat mission to Baghdad, a photographer captured an image of PFC Dwyer cradling a wounded Iraqi boy. The image became an iconic symbol of the American soldiers' dedication to duty. PFC Dwyer returned home, but due to complications from PTSD, he was never the same. Wracked by his inner demons, PFC Dwyer committed suicide on June 28,

2008 at the age of 31. The Program is driven by the camaraderie that comes from a shared experience of life in the military. The goals of the Program include helping returning veterans adjust to civilian life, pursue outreach and education, to provide peer support, encourage a connection among family, friends, and community, and to provide access to suicide prevention/intervention initiatives. "The Dwyer Vet2Vet program is fast becoming an integral component of our Veterans Life in Putnam County. Through the programs that we have established, we are reaching and having an impact on Veterans and their families in a non-clinical and non-threatening manner," said Karl Rhode, Director of Veteran Services in Putnam County. "One of the examples would be our Family Movie Days. We invite Veterans and family members to come watch a movie at the Carmel Cinema. They are able to sit with their families among other Veterans and their families, get a soda and bag of popcorn and enjoy a movie. No poking, prodding or testing going on, just a relaxing few hours with fellow Veterans. We have over sixty-five people attending this event. The program is a success and is growing every day." Art Hanley, Deputy Director for Veteran Services in Putnam County, used a quote he had heard while serving in Vietnam to describe his feelings about the program: "It is all about honoring the dead to serve the living." The Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Services Program in Putnam County is administered through the New York State (NYS) Office of Mental Health, the Mental Health Association of Putnam County and the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency.