



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew J. Lanza

## Lanza, Donovan, De Blasio, Staten Island Reps Press Dept. of Defense for Equity in Student- Veteran Assistance

ANDREW J. LANZA June 27, 2017

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**“It is outrageous that those Staten Island veterans who put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms are being discriminated against and short-changed by the very government they took an oath to protect,” said NYS Senator Lanza. “I thank Congressman Donovan and the Mayor for taking the lead in the fight to right this injustice.”**

*Unfair formula gives Staten Island student-vets 52% less than other boroughs in housing assistance; Electeds: Dept. of Defense formula harms Staten Island schools and vets; it must change*

Washington, DC – June 27, 2017....Congressman Dan Donovan (NY-11), Mayor Bill de Blasio, Staten Island Borough President James Oddo, NYS Senator Andrew Lanza, NYS Senator Diane Savino, NYS Assemblyman Michael Cusick, NYS Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis, NYS Assemblyman Ron Castorina, NYC Council Minority Leader Steven Matteo, and NYC Council Member Joe Borelli **today** sent a letter to the Department of Defense urging a change to the unfair Basic Allowance for Housing formula.

The Department of Defense, through the *Post-9/11 GI Bill*, provides housing assistance to veterans attending a college or university. The amount of assistance is pegged to the military’s standard Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), which offers rental assistance to service members when government quarters are not available. The Department of Defense has a formula to determine BAH payments by calculating average rental prices in 300

different Military Housing Areas. New York City has two Military Housing Areas: one for Staten Island, and one for the other four boroughs. The military provides BAH assistance to student-veterans according to the Military Housing Area in which their school is located, **not** according to where the veteran actually lives.

In 2017, the maximum housing allowance is \$4,098 for students attending a college in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. For Staten Island, the maximum is \$2,685, or 52% lower. Such a large disparity creates a huge disincentive for student-veterans who wish to attend school on Staten Island, even if that choice would be the most appropriate fit for their career aspirations.

**Congressman Donovan** said, “Anybody who lives in this area knows that Staten Island isn’t immune from New York City’s outrageous housing costs. Many areas of the borough are more expensive than the Bronx and parts of Brooklyn and Queens. This inequity harms vets who wish to attend Staten Island schools and is unjustifiable. I urge the Department of Defense to change its formula.”

**Mayor Bill de Blasio** said, “It is critical that the Department of Defense change the Basic Allowance for Housing formula immediately so that all New York City’s veterans are treated equally. The current system puts veterans going to school on Staten Island at an unfair disadvantage. Nothing should stand in the way of choosing the school that best addresses your personal and professional goals and you certainly shouldn’t be deprived of your full benefit based on what borough that school is in.”

According to the New York City Department of Veterans’ Services, 10.2% of all New York City veterans live on Staten Island, but only 1.5% of GI Bill users in the City attend school on Staten Island.

Donovan's 2016 letter also provided data on housing costs for each borough showing Staten Island's median gross rent is similar to the rest of New York City:

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Manhattan</b>	<b>Brooklyn</b>	<b>Queens</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Staten Island</b>
Median Gross Rent ('10-'14)	\$1,480	\$1,189	\$1,350	\$1,060	\$1,177
Median Selected Monthly Owner Costs (with a mortgage) ('10-'14)	\$3,090	\$2,618	\$2,460	\$2,404	\$2,426

“It is outrageous that those Staten Island veterans who put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms are being discriminated against and short-changed by the very government they took an oath to protect,” said **NYS Senator Lanza**. “I thank Congressman Donovan and the Mayor for taking the lead in the fight to right this injustice.”

**NYS Senator Diane Savino** said, “Staten Island residents are once again getting the short end of the stick. This problem is compounded by the reality that it is our veterans that are being harmed. By the works of a byzantine formula, Staten Island schools are losing out on quality students and Staten Island residents are losing out on quality neighbors. Staten Island is part of New York City, and once again should be treated as such.”

“The numbers clearly show that Staten Island veterans are being short-changed by the Department of Defense. Staten Islanders are never surprised by unfair treatment from the upper levels of government and, sadly, neither are our veterans. DOD needs to correct this inequity as quickly as possible. These veterans deserve nothing less,” said **NYS Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis**.

“The way the system works right now it does not make sense for a veteran to attend a school in Staten Island – you receive 52% less for housing, said **NYS Assemblyman Ron Castorina**.

“This puts veterans living on Staten Island in a situation where commuting to school off of the Island turns into a more logical financial decision – despite the average rent on Staten Island costing more than the Bronx and just shy of Brooklyn. Something needs to change.”

**NYC Council Minority Leader Steven Matteo** said, “With the highest per capita concentration of veterans in New York City, Staten Island has traditionally been a borough where so many of our military men and women call home, in part because of its naturally affordable housing.

But with housing costs skyrocketing, that is no longer the case. The federal government needs to adjust its veterans housing allowance for the borough to reflect that new reality, and make it equitable to allowances received for living in other boroughs.”

“I hope that the outpouring of support that this initiative has been receiving will encourage the Department of Defense to reconsider the current Military Housing Area policy, which has the inadvertent effect of contributing to the disproportionately low percentage of New York City veterans attending school in Staten Island,” said **NYC Council Member Joseph Borelli**.

**Paul Dietrich, Past Commander of the Richmond County Council of the Veterans of Foreign Wars**, said, “Student veterans who choose to attend a college or university on Staten Island, are at a significant economic disadvantage when compared to students in the other four boroughs of NYC based upon the way that their Post-9/11 GI Bill housing allowance is classified. Staten Island is a part of 5 boroughs of New York City and the housing and living costs are similar to the remainder of New York City therefore Staten Island should be included under MHA: 219- Military Housing Name: New York City. Without this change, Staten Island will remain as ‘the forgotten Borough.’”

“I am honored that the College of Staten Island continues to be recognized for its exemplary service to veterans, being awarded most recently with the Gold Award for 2017, an elite Military Friendly designation. CSI continues to pursue innovative and collaborative ways of ensuring that veterans in our community have access to the best possible resources and services. However, due to the large discrepancy in BAH, the College of Staten Island has experienced a steady decrease in veteran student enrollment as they transfer to other schools in NYC for a higher BAH rate. Veteran student enrollment at CSI will continue to decrease if the BAH is not adjusted to reflect that of New York City and other CUNY institutions. In order to best serve our student veterans on Staten Island who have faithfully

served the nation, I urge the Department of Defense to support this request,” said **William J. Fritz, Ph.D., President of the College of Staten Island.**

“At St. John’s, we believe that we have a responsibility to assist our student-veterans in their pursuit of higher education, including those who decide to attend college on Staten Island,” said **Conrado “Bobby” Gempesaw, Ph.D., President of St. John’s University.** “As a University with campuses in three of the five boroughs of New York City, we encourage the Department of Defense to remedy the inequity in the Basic Allowance for Housing formula so as to better serve our student-veterans who choose to attend college on Staten Island.”