



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Fred Akshar

11.10.17 - Senator Fred Akshar Announces Funding to Expand Peer- to-Peer Veterans Support Program and to Provide More Legal Aid to Veterans

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BINGHAMTON, N.Y. – Senator Fred Akshar joined local Veterans at the Floyd L. Maines Veterans Memorial Arena to announce the expansion of the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Support Program in the 52nd Senate District.

In 2016, Sen. Akshar secured \$120,000 in the State Budget to make Broome County the 16th county in New York to have its own Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans outreach program. The grant was administered through the Broome County Office of Veterans Services, which selected Clear Path for Veterans Southern Tier to provide the service.

Since August 2016, Clear Path for Veterans Southern Tier has served more than 1,000 local Veterans through various outreach programs, including peer support groups, group Veterans excursions – such as hiking trips – and mobile Canteen group meals held across Broome County as well as individual Veteran-to-Veteran outreach, advocacy and referral assistance.

In 2017, Sen. Akshar was able secure \$185,000 to expand the program to serve Veterans in surrounding Tioga and Chenango counties.

“One of the first meetings I took the year I started as state senator was with group of local Veterans who made it clear that our community needed more support services,” said Sen. Akshar. “Clear Path has done an amazing job reaching out to hundreds of local Veterans and giving them

the support, encouragement and assistance they need. I'm proud to continue this partnership with Broome County and Clear Path, and expanding their scope of coverage to reach more Veterans in the rural parts of the 52nd Senate District."

"Clear Path for Veterans provides programs and services to more than 18,000 Veterans each year across 23 counties in New York," said Clear Path's Peer Support Manager Venecia DeRoose. "But being able to concentrate our efforts to a local population takes a local presence, and Sen. Akshar has been a vital piece of that," DeRoose said. "The expansion of the Dwyer program will allow us to both expand our services to Veterans within Broome County and to the sister counties of Tioga and Chenango counties."

Broome County Veterans Services Director Brian Vojtisek said, "I'm pleased at the announcement funding for the Pfc Dwyer Peer to Peer Mentor Program has been approved for next year. Broome County's decision to choose ClearPath For Veterans to administer the program is fulfilling our mission of leaving no veteran behind."

As part of the expansion, Sen. Akshar, Clear Path for Veterans Southern Tier and Broome County are asking Veterans in the Southern Tier community to help get involved in Veterans support groups.

"The Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Program was created because the best people to offer support to Veterans are usually fellow Veterans," said Sen. Akshar. "We're asking Veterans in the community to be a part of Clear Path for Veterans' Wingman Peer Program, where Veterans volunteer their time to share activities and just be there for their fellow servicemen and women."

Clear Path's Wingman Program focuses on "pairing Veterans with experienced counterparts who can guide the reintegration of these warriors into their community," DeRoose said. "When we say 'Service After Service,' we mean that Veterans as a group maintain the desire to serve well after their military tenure has completed. Our Wingman Program empowers Veterans to establish and maintain independent, purpose-driven lives after service."

\$15,000 for the Legal Aid Society for Veterans Legal Services

Sen. Akshar also announced \$15,000 in funding for the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York to provide legal assistance to Broome County Veterans. Veterans in need of legal assistance will be able to obtain consultation from Legal Aid staff along with referrals to pro bono or Legal Aid attorneys to deal with cases ranging from foreclosure, divorce, child support, cases involving domestic violence, bankruptcy, end of life planning – wills, powers of attorney and health care proxies – to a range of other civil legal matters depending on their financial status.

Legal Aid staff will also screen Veterans for the services described above during their monthly “Talk to a Lawyer” pro bono clinic at the Binghamton Vet Center. In addition, for matters only requiring advice and counsel, Veterans may be matched with a Legal Aid helpline attorney for telephone advice.

Arlene Sanders, Director of Pro Bono Programs for Legal Aid Society of Mid-NY said, “We are enormously grateful for these funds which will enable us to double the number of clinics with the Vet Center and significantly expand our services to Vets.”

“Veterans sacrifice so much so that we can enjoy the freedoms and opportunities this country provides,” said Sen. Akshar. “The least we can do as grateful citizens is to provide as many opportunities as we can for them when they return home.”