



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David Carlucci

Senator Carlucci Delivers For Area Veterans

SENATOR DAVID CARLUCCI April 17, 2019

| ISSUE: **VETERANS**



Senator Carlucci, Chairman of the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee, advocated for and supported a budget that allocated \$185,000 to the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program in Rockland and Westchester Counties. A total of \$3,735,000 in funding went to the Joseph P. Dwyer Program across the state, and for the first time \$300,000 was allocated to expand the program into New York City.

The Joseph P. Dwyer program offers peer-to-peer counseling services to veterans who

maybe suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

"The Joseph P. Dwyer Program helps to eliminate the stigma surrounding PTSD. The peer-to-peer model is what makes the program work. Someone who has been through a trauma can help walk others through the process with much better results than someone who has not been in a similar situation," said Senator David Carlucci. "We need to continue to invest in novel approaches that deliver results because the Department of Veterans Affairs is telling us that about 20 veterans take their life every day. Our heroes who have sacrificed so much need our help."

The Rockland based program is operated through BRIDGES and supported by the Rockland County Departments of Mental Health and Veteran Services Agency. Funding for the program is critical in Rockland because it will help in veteran family supports, educational outreach, cultural competency training, and the Veteran Service Animal Program, among other things.

"Thanks to our representatives, including Senator David Carlucci, the funding for the Veteran Peer-to-Peer program is restored and furthermore expanded to areas where support is needed. This program helps bring veterans out of a dark place and into a supported environment, allowing them to engage in community life. BRIDGES is thankful to have elected officials behind this program and looks forward assisting more veterans in our area," said CEO of BRIDGES, Carlos Martinez.

"To prevent veteran suicide, we must help reduce veterans' risk for suicide before they reach a crisis point and support those who are in crisis. This requires the expansion of treatment and prevention services and a continued focus on innovative services. It also requires

effective networks of support, communication, and care across the communities where veterans live and work,” said Michael Leitzes, Commissioner of Rockland County’s Department Mental Health. “The peer-to-peer program does all that in Rockland County, and we greatly appreciate the support of Senator Carlucci's efforts in not just maintaining the program in Rockland County, but in expanding the program to meet the needs of all veterans throughout New York State.”

“It can be very difficult for a veteran to admit that he or she may have PTSD and may need help. Veterans are the defenders of others, and because of this, many times a veteran will wait until he or she is in a near crisis or crisis situation before reaching out for help,” said Susan Branam, Director of Rockland County’s Veterans Service Agency. “When they do reach out for help, we know statistically that they have a much better chance of discussing their issues with another veteran. This is what the PFC Dwyer peer-to-peer program does - it pairs up one veteran with another veteran, as a "battle buddy," so that they are not facing their demons alone. That is why I have PFC Dwyer outreach coordinators working in the Veterans Service Agency. When we get veterans that need help, we connect them immediately with another veteran. But the program doesn't stop after a veteran has been paired with another veteran. There is ongoing contact with the veteran through social activities and groups, which can help veterans feel like they are not alone. We still have a national veteran suicide rate of 20 per day. With the approval of the 2019 New York state budget to include the PFC Dwyer program, we are letting veterans know that they are not alone.”

Since the program’s inception in 2012, thousands of veterans have participated in Rockland County. The program is also offered in 22 other counties, including Westchester.

The program is named after Private First Class Joseph Dwyer, who was a U.S. Army Combat Medic and a Suffolk County resident that served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. PFC Dwyer received national attention after a photograph surfaced that showed him carrying a

wounded Iraqi boy, while his unit was fighting its way to Baghdad. After returning home and struggling with PTSD, PFC Dwyer succumbed to his condition, taking his own life in 2008.

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April 12, 2019

In Senate Committee Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs

Sponsored by John E. Brooks

Do you support this bill?