



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shelley B. Mayer

Senators Mayer & Harckham Present Vietnam Veteran Frank Romeo with the NYS Senate Liberty Medal

SHELLEY B. MAYER May 10, 2019

| ISSUE: **VETERANS, MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, VETERANS AFFAIRS, MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH**



On Friday, May 10th, State Senators Shelley Mayer (SD-37) and Peter Harckham (SD-40) presented Frank Romeo with the NYS Senate Liberty Medal for his work to educate returning Veterans as well as elected officials, communities, advocates, and young people about the effects of war and the debilitating impact of PTSD on the lives of Veterans and

their families. They were joined at the ceremony by Westchester County Director of the Veterans Service Agency, Ronald Tocci, and members of the American Legion Post 135 in White Plains.

Mr. Romeo, a Vietnam War Veteran, has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for 50 years. For the past 30 years, Mr. Romeo has been an advocate for mental health services for Veterans. In 2019, on his 70th birthday, Mr. Romeo launched Walk with Frank, a 750-mile journey across New York State to raise awareness of the link between PTSD and homelessness in the Veteran population.

According to a **study** by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, as of 2018, there were nearly 40,000 homeless Veterans across the United States. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) **reports** that 45 percent of homeless Veterans suffer from mental illness, predominantly PTSD. The VA also **reports** that from 2008-2016, over 6,000 Veterans committed suicide each year.

Senator Shelley B. Mayer, 37th Senate District, said, “I am pleased to stand with Senator Peter Harckham to present Frank Romeo with a NYS Senate Liberty Medal for over 30 years of work educating the public and advocating for Veterans and their mental health needs. We are grateful to Frank for his work educating communities, officials, and students about the invisible mental health wounds Veterans carry home long after their military service is over. I will continue to press for increased mental health and housing resources for Veterans. Those who have served our country abroad deserve our support.”

Senator Pete Harckham, 40th Senate District, said, “Most people celebrate their 70th birthday with a party or special vacation. That Frank Romeo chose his milestone birthday to make a 750-mile walk across New York State to highlight the struggles of veterans suffering from PTSD is all you need to know about the man, his character and determination. Thank you, Frank, for serving as an inspiration to all veterans suffering from PTSD as well as co-occurring conditions such as mental illness, drug addiction and homelessness.”

Frank Romeo, Vietnam Veteran, said, “As one of the longest living veterans diagnosed with 100% PTSD related disabilities I know the cause and effect of this socially crippling disease. For 30 years, I’ve traveled the country teaching and advocating for PTSD and related mental health issues. Now at age 70 I’m walking across NYS to gather attention and to raise awareness for these very issues.”

Ronald Tocci, Director of the Veteran Service Agency of Westchester County, said, “Thanks to Senator Mayer and Senator Harckham helping bring awareness to the plight of our Veteran heroes suffering from PTSD and mental health issues. Special acknowledgment to Vietnam Veteran Frank Romeo for his courage and sacrifice. Frank’s personal mission brings attention to the need for change in public policy.