

# Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Senator Helming Announces Action to Strengthen Veteran Suicide Prevention Through Improved Reporting**

Fighting for veterans has long been a top priority for Senator Pam Helming. This week marks a significant milestone in that effort with the long-delayed implementation of a law she supported to improve the reporting of veteran deaths by suicide. This long-overdue step will strengthen prevention efforts and save lives.

Senator Helming sponsored the legislation in 2019 to ensure New York State could more accurately track and understand veteran suicide. The bill was signed into law in 2021 and requires coroners and medical examiners to report suspected veteran suicides to the State Division of Veterans' Services. The division is then tasked with analyzing trends and publishing regular reports to inform prevention strategies.

But despite the law being on the books, a critical piece was missing.

The reporting form required by the law had never been created or distributed, leaving counties unable to report consistently and preventing the state from producing the data needed to identify warning signs, regional trends, and opportunities for early intervention.

"That failure was unacceptable," Senator Helming said. "When it comes to veteran suicide, delays cost lives."

After the issue was raised by the Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council, Senator Helming took action. She sent multiple letters to the Governor, met with senior administration officials, and pressed relentlessly for implementation. That sustained advocacy has now paid off.

The Department of Health has finalized the required reporting form and began distributing it statewide, finally activating the law's lifesaving intent.

About 17 U.S. veterans die by suicide each day, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Behind every number is a family shattered, a community grieving, and a promise broken to someone who once wore the uniform in service to our country.

“This is about honoring our veterans not just with words, but with action,” Senator Helming said. “Accurate data saves lives. It helps spot trends sooner, intervene earlier, and connect veterans to the help they need before it’s too late.”

Senator Helming extended special thanks to Wayne Thompson and the Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council, Livingston County Veterans Service Director David Terry, and Robert Waltman, President of the NYS Association of County Coroners and Medical Examiners, for their instrumental work and unwavering partnership. Their advocacy helped ensure that this law moved from paper to practice.

Veteran organizations say the implementation of the reporting form will strengthen coordination among state agencies, county veteran service officers, and community-based groups working on the front lines of outreach and prevention. It will also support critical resources like the Veterans Crisis Line and local VA services, including the Canandaigua VA.

“The Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council and Veterans across New York State appreciate the creation of this important means of collecting, analyzing, and trending veteran suicide data in a timely manner in the Finger Lakes region and across the state. This is critical for the development and direction of a successful suicide-prevention plan. As Chairman of the Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council, Jim Wideman was vital in this process of gathering statistics for veteran suicide prevention. He has supported our efforts consistently over the years, keeping this on our agenda and reaching out to others who could help us move forward,” said Wayne Thompson, Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council.

Mr. Thompson added, “In addition, we would like to recognize Dr. Stephanie Gamble of the VA Suicide Prevention Center of Excellence for her continuous leadership, support, and assistance in this vital endeavor. We are also very appreciative of Terry Haskin, NP, Ontario County Coroner, for her assistance in bringing this process to fruition. We thank Senator Helming for her leadership and support as well. This will hopefully turn out to be a model for other states to use.”

For veterans or family members in crisis, help is available 24/7 through the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1) or by texting 838255.

“This is not the end of the work,” Senator Helming added. “But it is a powerful step forward and a reminder that when we listen to our veterans and act with urgency, we can make a real difference.”

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