



New York State Council of Veterans' Organizations

Adaptive Sports Foundation, Alliance of Public Retiree Organizations; American Military Retirees Association, American Ex-Prisoners of War, AMVETS, Black Veterans for Social Justice, Inc., Blinded Veterans Association, Catholic War Veterans, Civil Service Employees Association Veterans Committee, Council 82 AFSCME AFL-CIO Veterans Committee, Combat Infantrymen's Association, Inc., County Veterans Service Officers Association of NYS; Disabled American Veterans, Fleet Reserve Association, Jewish War Veterans, Korean War Veterans Association, Marine Corps League, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Public Employees Federation Veterans Committee, SAGEVets, The Retired Enlisted Association, United Federation of Teachers Veterans Committee, United Spinal Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Veterans for Peace, and 369th Veterans Association, Inc.

NYS Council of Veterans' Organizations 2021/2022 Join Budget Hearing on Human Services February 9, 2021

Thank you for being here and listening to us. There are many many great programs for Veterans. One has only to look at the Why6Vet website (I strongly urge you to do so now if you wish) and you will find dozens of programs designed for Veterans and their families to survive and thrive in the Hudson Valley area. There are programs like this all over New York State and they are growing in numbers, quality, and effectiveness but the program that starts at the grass roots and percolates from the grass roots up is the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer to Peer mentoring program.

We are here to discuss that program and how it interacts with the Veterans Defense Program (VDP), and Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC) because we feel that any successful program for Veterans must interact with local Posts, and County Veteran Service officers in order to get maximum impact from the budget dollars spent. The budget dollars funnel through the Office of Mental Health and the Division of Veterans Services, ultimately to implement programs at the county level coordinated by Veteran Services and local veteran support agencies like Why6Vet.

Right now the Dwyer program involves the Veteran Service Officer at each Post. These committed individuals mentor the Veteran with day to day issues much like Alcoholics Anonymous works, always in a confidential way. These mentors in turn work with county VSO's and the VA to identify all benefits available to the veteran.

Sometimes this is all that is needed to get a troubled veteran on a path. Not always, which is where VTC and VDP come in. The Legislature has seen value in these programs and has targeted funds wisely, based on outcomes, and we are here to encourage continued funding because Dwyer works, VTC's work and the VDP program is the stopgap between the Veteran and felony incarceration. It works and has the trackrecord to prove it.

Each of these programs, when outcomes measurement is applied saves the state countless millions which you have heard before. What you may not have heard is how the programs work together and perhaps cannot appreciate the total impact of these programs.

VDP and VTC are not just alternative sentencing programs. They embrace behavioral redirection that has the support of every veteran at the local level, and believe me, veterans care about their fellow veteran. Mentoring at the Post can't always do what is necessary to keep the veteran out of the courts. Once there, the VTC can take what is usually a lower level offense and through an alternative sentence and continued, directed mentoring get the Veteran back on point. All of this requires seasoned mentors which ultimately come from

volunteers at the Post level. The Veteran's Council and the VFW have legislation designed to better prepare mentors through online OMH peer to peer accreditation programs, which we will bring before you this legislative session.

Veteran Treatment Court can be the remedy beyond VTC. Offenses are usually at the felony level and require a full understanding by the court of the post traumatic stress that may have caused this veteran to get that far. The word is out on the VDP and veterans now know, anecdotally or otherwise, that if facing a serious felony there is still hope to change direction. An example comes to mind of the vet contemplating suicide driving erratically with a loaded pistol in the trunk. In New York that is a felony. He was treated and there was a happy ending.

This legislature is reviewing VDP and Dwyer and expanding VTC's in this budget. The objective as clearly stated by the Chairs of the Veterans Committees of both houses and joint budget committees in past budget years, is to populate these key Veteran programs in all counties.

Our heads are not in the sand, and we know that funding programs will be limited. We are asking that appropriations be maintained at last session's levels.

Our panel is here to address questions you may have, and again thanks for being there.