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NEW YORK
STATE
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February 3, 2021

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President Pro Tempore and Senate Majority Leader
Room 330, State Capitol
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable John Brooks
Chairman, Senate Committee on Veterans,
Homeland Security and Military Affairs
Legislative Office Building, Room 806
Albany, NY 12247

Re: Fully funding the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program in the 2021-22 State Budget and releasing 2020-21 funding to counties administering peer-to-peer support programs

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Chairman Brooks:

I write respectfully requesting that the State Senate fully fund the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program (aka, the Dwyer Program) at a minimum of last year's \$4.5 million investment as part of the 2021-22 State Budget. As Governor Cuomo's 2021-22 Executive Budget proposal once again failed to include any funding for this important, life-saving initiative that helps our military veterans, it is critical that the State Senate restore this program. Additionally, I am requesting that the State Senate authorize the expedited release of previously approved Dwyer Program funding for the counties that provide these essential services.

Created through the 2012-13 State Budget, the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program is a groundbreaking initiative that helps veterans dealing with the invisible wounds of war, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and depression. This proven program empowers veterans to meet with other veterans in a safe, secure, and comfortable atmosphere so they may help one another by providing life-saving counseling services and support. Military veterans are much more likely to confer in, and trust, their peers who have endured similar experiences.

Last year, the State Senate secured \$4.5 million for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program including \$100,000 for Columbia County, \$145,000 for Rensselaer County, and \$185,000 for Saratoga County, all of which reside in my 43rd Senate District. Saratoga County's Peer-to-Peer program, in particular, has been continually recognized for its excellence in helping veterans and serves as a model for our entire state.

Funding for veterans' programs is not a luxury; it is a priority. The Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program should be fully funded through our 2021-22 State Budget. New York State – and our State Senate in particular– should work in a bipartisan fashion to ensure a sustained commitment to funding initiatives like the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program that makes a positive difference in our veterans' lives. Our veterans cannot afford for this important program to go unfunded or underfunded.

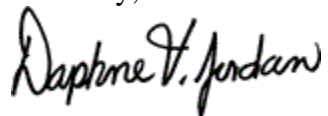
I also request that all previously approved Dwyer Program funding be immediately released to the respective 23 counties that administer the initiative, provide these services, and are urgently awaiting their designated funding so they may continue helping America's heroes. There is a dire need for this funding right now. In fact, one of the counties in my 43rd Senate District that provides Dwyer Program services only has enough funding for two weeks, and there are still considerable expenses to pay.

Toward this end, I ask that you direct the State Office of Mental Health and the State Division of the Budget to release all funding allocated in last year's State Budget for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program. Furthermore, I request that all of the program monies from the final quarter of the 19-20 FY that are being withheld be released.

It is my honor to again stand with my local Veterans' Service Directors and proud military veterans Peter Goebel from Rensselaer County, Frank McClement from Saratoga County, and Gary Flaherty from Columbia County, respectively, in making this funding request in support of the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Support Program.

Thank you for your consideration of our budgetary request made on behalf of New York State's military veterans and their families.

Sincerely,



Daphne Jordan
State Senator, 43rd District

Peter Goebel, Director, Rensselaer County Veterans Service Agency
Frank McClement, Director, Saratoga County Veterans' Service Agency
Gary Flaherty, Director, Columbia County Veterans Services Agency