



NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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Contact: Jonathan Heppner | heppner@nysenate.gov | 518-455-2415

Senate Majority Passes Veteran Protections in Honor of Memorial Day

(Albany, NY) Today, the Senate Democratic Majority advanced legislation to protect the rights and wellbeing of New York’s veterans. We are home to the [fifth largest](#) veteran population, with nearly a million former service members residing in the Empire State. Today’s measures build on the Democratic Conference’s longstanding efforts to uphold and promote the best interests of those who have dedicated themselves to their country by improving the services and protections afforded to them. Although we cannot repay the debt that is owed to the brave men and women of New York, we can always advocate for their dignity and security in retirement.

Today’s legislation includes measures that would authorize close friends or family members to fulfill veterans’ burial wishes at their behest; require a study from SUNY and CUNY on the availability of campus resources for veterans; notify local veteran agencies and organizations of a member’s return to provide expedient support; clarify the definition of “veteran” for tax purposes, and establish the Alex R. Jiménez New York State Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program. While New York State remembers the service members who are no longer with us, we will look to improve the quality of life for those who are still here and their families.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, “In honor of Memorial Day, we are proud to advance legislation that will further support our Veteran community and protect their best interests. Although Memorial Day comes once a year, our reverence for those who have served is ongoing. In remembrance of those who have given the ultimate sacrifice, we will continue to make our state more accommodating for the Veterans who remain, by promoting policies that expand their access to services, protect their livelihoods, and uphold their dignity. I want to thank the bill sponsors for putting forth this crucial legislation, and I also thank all those who have answered the highest call to defend this country.”

Chair of the Veterans Committee and Bill Sponsor, Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton, said, "As Chair of the Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs, I am proud that this package of bills will work together to address many of the issues faced by our veterans after they complete their service to this country. Bill S5416, which I am proud to sponsor, will work to improve communication between our local veterans' service agencies and our returning service men and women. By ensuring that these agencies are promptly notified upon their return, moving forward our State's veterans will have immediate access to the vital services and resources

available to them in order to successfully reintegrate into civilian life. This package is just another step that New York State is taking to actively support our veterans the way that they have always supported us."

The legislation passed by the Senate Democratic Majority includes:

- **Expanded Authorization for Veterans' Wishes:** This bill, [S5530](#), sponsored by Senator Samra Brouk, authorizes a veteran's close friend or family member who is familiar with that veteran's wishes to request that they be buried in a state veterans' cemetery.
- **Establishing the Alex R. Jiménez Program:** This bill, [S3586](#), sponsored by Senator Nathalia Fernandez, establishes the Alex R. Jiménez New York State Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program.
- **Alternative Tax Exemption for Veterans:** This bill, [S5967](#), sponsored by Senator Pete Harckham, clarifies the definition of veteran to include career members of the armed forces for purposes of the veterans alternative tax exemption.
- **Study on SUNY/CUNY Student-Veteran Services:** This bill, [S5241](#), sponsored by Senator James Sanders, requires the State University of New York and the City University of New York to examine and conduct a study on the availability of campus services, programs and resources for veteran students
- **Timely Issuance of Certificates of Honorable Separation:** This bill, [S5416](#), sponsored by Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton, relates to certificates of honorable separation from or service in the armed forces of the United States, in order to ensure that local veterans' service agencies are notified upon the return home of service men and women in order to better connect services available to veterans.

Bill Sponsor Senator Samra Brouk said: "I'm grateful to the Majority Leader and my colleagues in the Senate for their support in passing my legislation to expand authorization for burials in a state veterans' cemetery. Too often, our service members are not treated with the dignity and compassion they deserve, and today's package of legislation is a significant step forward in making sure that they are treated with the respect they deserve."

Bill Sponsor Senator Nathalia Fernandez said: "This legislation establishes the Alex R. Jiménez New York State Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program, which will offer assistance to foreign-born family members of New York State Veterans, discharged LGBT Veterans, currently serving service members, and non-citizen service members or veterans in securing legal immigration status in the United States. By providing support and a streamlined process for legal immigration, we aim to honor the sacrifices of our veterans and their families and ensure they can fully participate in the opportunities that our country offers."

Bill Sponsor Senator Pete Harckham said: "Our Veterans of Armed Forces and their family members deserve all the benefits and support possible, including tax exemptions they are qualified for and entitled to. I applaud the efforts of my Senate Colleagues in passing vital legislation to ensure the well-being of our Veterans, which will create peace of mind and save lives in the long run."

Bill Sponsor Senator James Sanders said: "As a Veteran myself, I see just how crucial it is that our Veterans are met with the opportunities they need and deserve as a result of their devotion to

our great nation. The Senate Democratic Majority recognizes the responsibility we hold to our Veterans, and we have created the Veterans Package, an array of legislation for the benefit of Veterans. By implementing studies aimed at ensuring student programs and assistance are accessible on SUNY and CUNY campuses to Veterans, establishing a Veteran-Owned Business database, and expanding employment protections for those in the National Guard to name just a few, we have the power to improve the lives of Veterans across the state. Therefore, it is imperative that this legislation package be made a reality for our men and women in uniform."

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New York State Senate | senatedemocraticmajority@nysenate.gov | 518-455-2415