

Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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Senator Helming Announces Signing of Bill to Improve Reporting of Veteran Deaths by Suicide to Support Prevention Efforts

A bill co-sponsored by Senator Pam Helming to improve the reporting of veteran deaths by suicide to better inform prevention strategies has been signed into law (S.2036B).

The new law directs coroners, coroner's physicians or medical examiners to report on a one-page form to the state Division of Veterans' Services any death that appears to be a suicide by a person believed to be a veteran.

The Division of Veterans' Services must create a report including the number of veterans who died by suicide, trends in the data over a five-year period, and a comparison of veteran suicide rates by county, statewide, and nationally. The first report will be due in June 2024 and then every three years after. The report will be posted on the division's website.

Senator Helming said, "Suicide is a national public health issue that affects everyone, but disproportionately affects veterans and service members, who are more likely to die by suicide than non-veterans. This new law will improve the reporting of veteran deaths by suicide so we have better data that can help us assist more veterans in crisis. Special thanks to Wayne Thompson, Dave Poteet, Jason Skinner and members of the Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council for their instrumental work on this legislation. With lifesaving resources like the Veterans Crisis Line at the Canandaigua VA, and more accurate data, we can hopefully help more veterans and their families."

Wayne Thompson, U.S. Marine Corps veteran and Chairman of the Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council said, "Veteran suicide is a tragedy occurring among our nation's heroes much too often. According to New York State statistics, from 2016-2018, 65 veterans in the Finger Lakes region and 554 veterans across New York State have been lost to suicide, while an average of 22 veterans per day are lost to suicide across

the United States. The Finger Lakes Veterans Advocacy Council-Community Veterans Engagement Board recognized we needed to join the fight to prevent veteran suicide. As we partnered with the VA's Suicide Prevention Center of Excellence in this fight, we also asked Senator Helming to join us by sponsoring this bill requiring coroners to collect and share these statistics with the VA. We are grateful Senator Helming has shepherded this bill to fruition because this is a significant step toward getting an accurate accounting of the size of this tragedy."

The Veterans Crisis Line is a free and confidential resource for veterans and service members who are in crisis. Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1. Or text 838255. Online chat is also available at VeteransCrisisLine.net.

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