



**New York State Assembly**

Carl E. Heastie, Speaker

# ANNUAL REPORT 2015

A dark blue silhouette of a city skyline, including various skyscrapers and buildings, positioned behind the large white text of the title.

Committee on

**Veterans' Affairs**

Michael G. DenDekker, Chair



THE ASSEMBLY  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

COMMITTEES  
Aging  
Alcoholism & Drug  
Abuse  
Governmental  
Employees  
Labor  
Transportation

MICHAEL G. DENDEKKER  
Assemblymember 34<sup>th</sup> District

CHAIR  
Veterans' Affairs Committee

December 15, 2015

Honorable Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker  
New York State Assembly  
Room 932 Legislative Office Building  
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Mr. Speaker:

It is with great pleasure that I forward to you the 2015 Annual Report of the New York State Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Several significant pieces of legislation became law this year, including legislation to permit a county or City of New York to request a congressional chartered veterans' organization to conduct funeral and burial services for indigent veterans. The state will reimburse the organizations for those expenses at a maximum of \$2,000, exclusive of state and federal expenses which are already covered.

The Committee also advanced legislation to increase the maximum real property tax exemption allowable under the alternative exemption for veterans and the Cold War veterans' exemption if the municipality adopts a local law, ordinance or resolution.

While a number of our legislative goals were achieved this past session, much more remains to be done. In 2016, the Committee will focus on helping veterans who have recently been discharged to readjust to civilian life and will continue to examine issues related to senior and women veterans.

I wish to extend my appreciation and many thanks to the members of the Committee, the Committee staff, the veterans of New York State and to you, Mr. Speaker, for your unwavering support for veterans.

Sincerely,

Michael G. DenDekker  
Member of Assembly

**NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
Honorable Michael G. DenDekker  
Chair**

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Joanne B. Martin, Principal Analyst  
Kerryanne Burke, Associate Counsel  
Collen Honan, Committee Assistant  
Kenny Mendoza, Committee Clerk  
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## **I. COMMITTEE JURISDICTION AND SUMMARY**

The Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs evaluates legislation affecting nearly one million New York State residents, which includes 63,899 New York State women, who unselfishly served their nation in the United States armed forces. The Committee seeks to safeguard programs and promote legislation to benefit veterans and their families. In addition, the Committee maintains an ongoing dialogue with the veteran community and addresses issues affecting the lives of New York State veterans.

Veterans are affected by a number of titles of New York State statute, principally: Civil Service Law, Executive Law, Military Law, Education Law, Real Property Tax Law, Public Health Law, and Retirement and Social Security Law. Amendments to the State constitution that would affect veterans are also considered by the Committee. New York State currently offers a variety of veterans' assistance programs, including a real property tax exemption program, educational assistance for certain veterans and their family members, and a state veterans' nursing home program.

This past legislative session, the Committee held five committee meetings at which it considered 93 bills. Six passed both houses of the Legislature, six were signed into law by the Governor. The Committee was represented at the American Legion Department of New York Convention held in Buffalo, New York and the New York State Women Veterans Recognition Day event at the New York State Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

While the Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs has jurisdiction over legislation that affects veterans' benefits and programs that help veterans and their families, the Committee does not work alone. Some initiatives advanced by individual veterans and veterans' service organizations are referred to other standing committees, such as Governmental Operations, Transportation, Real Property Taxation, Health, Governmental Employees, Environmental Conservation, Election Law, Small Business, Mental Health, Labor, and Tourism, Parks, Arts, and Sports Development. As a result, the Committee's chair, members, and staff must work closely with other committees to ensure that this unique population's needs are met.

## **II. 2015 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS**

### **A. Real Property Tax Exemptions**

Virtually all real property tax exemptions granted to veterans in New York State fall into three categories: the fixed dollar amount “eligible funds” category (Real Property Tax Exemption Section 458); the percentage-of-exemption “alternative” category (Real Property Tax Law Section 458-A) and the “Cold War veterans’ percentage-of-exemption value” category (Real Property Tax Law Section 458-B).

#### **1. Increase Veterans Exemptions**

**(A. 6223-A Thiele; Chapter 381 of the Laws of 2015)**

This measure creates an additional local option to increase the maximum exemptions allowed under the alternative veterans’ exemptions and the Cold War veterans’ exemption.

This act takes effect January 2, 2016, provided that the increase in the maximum allowable exemption amount shall apply only to local laws adopted on or after such a date.

#### **2. Transfer Real Property Within a County**

**(A.2646 Bronson; Chapter 538)**

This statute allows a county or a city having a population of one million or more persons to adopt a local law, ordinance, or resolution to allow an assessor to transfer the exemption, on a pro-rated basis, of a veteran who moves to a new housing unit within the same county or city having a population of one million or more persons, in the fiscal year that such move occurred.

### **B. Admission to the New York State Veterans Home Program**

**(A. 7229-A DenDekker; Chapter 414 of the Laws of 2015)**

Section 2632 of the Public Health Law established requirements for admission to the four New York State Veterans Nursing Homes under the jurisdiction of the New York State Health Department. They are located in Oxford (Chenango County), St. Albans (Queens County), Batavia (Genesee County) and Montrose (Westchester County).

This measure would expand the list of veterans eligible for admission to the New York State Veterans’ Home program under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health. Now included would be veterans who served in Bosnia and Herzegovina and veterans who were exposed to radiation during military service in “radiation-risk activity.” In addition, the statute would clarify those veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn

and were the recipient of the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, or the Afghanistan Campaign Medal are eligible for admission.

**C. Vietnam Veterans Benevolent Orders  
(A. 6101 Kaminsky; Chapter 400 of the Laws of 2015)**

Founded in 1978, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the only national Vietnam Veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA's goals are to promote and support the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans, to create a new identity for this generation of veterans, and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans. This chapter declares the Vietnam Veterans of America a "benevolent order" thus granting such organization various benefits available to specified veterans' organizations.

**D. Burial of Indigent Veterans  
(A. 7867-A DenDekker; Chapter 579 of the Laws of 2015)**

For any veteran who dies without sufficient funds, insurance or a designated next of kin, the county of residence or City of New York may request a congressional chartered veterans' organization to conduct funeral and burial services. The State, under this measure, shall reimburse such organizations for such services at a maximum of \$2,000, exclusive of state and federal expenses which are already covered.

**E. Veteran-Owned Small Business Account  
(A. 4487-A Ramos; Chapter 523 the Laws of 2015)**

This measure requires the Division of Veterans' Affairs to include an accounting of the number of veteran-owned small businesses in the State of New York in its annual report to the Governor and Legislature.

### **III. BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **A. Division of Veterans' Affairs**

The Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) assists, counsels, and advocates for veterans, military personnel, and their families.

##### **1. Veteran Counseling Program**

The Veteran Counseling Services Program provides counseling and claims services through a statewide network of state veteran counselors. The counselors, all of whom are veterans, and support staff help veterans complete and file applications for state, federal, and private benefits and services. State veteran counselors receive professional training in veterans' benefits counseling and are accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The SFY 2015-16 budget appropriated \$5,779,000 for services and expenses related to the Veteran Counseling Program in the State Operations Fund and \$3,677,000 from the General and Special Revenue Fund and Aid to Localities funding.

##### **2. County and City Veterans Service Agencies**

County and city veterans' service agencies are mandated by state law to inform members of the armed forces, reserves, organized militia, and veterans and their families about available education, retraining, medical, and other rehabilitative services.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$1,177,000 for the payment of aid to county and city veterans' service agencies.

##### **3. Monroe County Veterans Outreach Center**

The Monroe County Veterans Outreach Center in Rochester, New York (Monroe County) is the oldest community-based outreach center serving veterans of all eras. Its mission is to improve the lives of veterans and their dependents by offering free veteran-specific programs. The Outreach Center also provides counseling services for successful reintegration of veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts into the community, short-term psychological counseling, residential programs for homeless veterans, and an alternative to incarceration program through the Rochester veterans' court.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included of \$250,000 for the services and expenses related to the Veterans Outreach Center, Inc. the Legislature added an additional \$250,000 for services and expenses of the Veterans Outreach Center, Inc.

#### **4. Buffalo Service Office/New York City Service Office**

The Department of New York Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has two veterans' service offices. One is located in Buffalo and the other in New York City. These offices have accredited veterans' counselors who help discharged veterans navigate the myriad of benefits available.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$50,000 for additional services and expenses of the Buffalo Service Officer and \$75,000 for additional services and expenses of the New York City Service Office. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

#### **5. Vietnam Veterans of America New York State Council**

The Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the nation's only congressionally chartered veterans' service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. The Council provides assistance in navigating the various benefits available to veterans and their family members.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$25,000 for the Vietnam Veterans of America New York State Council. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

#### **6. Legal Services New York City (LSNYC) Veterans Justice Project (VJP)**

The Veterans Justice Project (VJP) identifies systemic barriers that prevent housing stability, economic security, and basic survival, and challenges them through coordinated advocacy. The program addresses the following issues: HUD-VA supportive housing issues; evictions; foreclosures; unemployment insurance denials; debt collection/wage garnishment; child support; wills and powers of attorney; divorce; custody; special education; and Social Security/SSI. Since the project was launched in 2011, at least 2,000 veterans and their family members have been assisted.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$100,000 for the Veterans Justice Project. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

#### **7. Warrior Salute**

CDS Monarch in Webster, New York developed Warrior Salute to help service members and their families regain their lives and dreams by providing clinical and family support services, quality employment opportunities, and temporary housing.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$200,000 for the Warrior Salute. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

**8. Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders (SAGE)**

Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders (SAGE) has established a comprehensive program for New York State's LGBT elder veterans that provides legal counsel, benefit advocacy, and enhanced wrap-around services in order to improve these veterans' income security and overall well-being.

In addition, legal representation will enable LGBT veterans currently on public assistance, Medicaid, and other state subsidy programs to make applications and appeals for veterans' benefits, including but not limited to income, medical, spousal, and survivor benefits. The SAGE program will provide assistance to LGBT veterans by upgrading their discharge status, if it is necessary for them to access federal VA benefits.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$100,000 to implement SAGE's comprehensive program for New York State's LGBT elder veterans. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

**9. Legal Services of the Hudson Valley Veterans and Military Families Advocacy Project**

The Veterans and Military Families Advocacy Project, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley provides a full range of civil legal services that resolve the unique legal problems faced by veterans and their families. These services include providing representation to resolve issues with consumer credit reports, accessing quality health care, applying for veteran's benefits, and securing family and housing legal assistance. This program covers more than 120,000 veterans living in Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$200,000 for this program.

**10. American Legion Department of New York for Indigent Burial Expenses**

Indigent veterans are defined as those who die with no next of kin to claim their remains and insufficient funds to cover burial expenses. Burial expenses are paid by the federal government, counties, cities and various congressional chartered veterans' organizations.

In the budget for SFY 2015-16, \$250,000 was appropriated for the American Legion Department of New York to conduct these military funeral honors statewide. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

#### **11. New York State Defenders Association Veterans Defense Program**

The Veterans Defense Program (VDP) provides in-depth training and support to facilitate and encourage informed and zealous representation of veterans involved in criminal and family court matters. The VDP helps the most vulnerable of our veterans by assisting defense attorneys in providing justice to veterans with mental health issues arising out of their service and facilitating treatment to begin healing the wounds of war.

The New York State Defenders Association is providing training and expert legal assistance to attorneys in 120 county-based public defender offices, legal aid agencies, and assigned counsel offices.

In the budget for SFY 2015-16, \$500,000 was appropriated for this important veterans program. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

#### **12. Administration Program**

The Administration Program is primarily composed of two components, Supplemental Burial Benefits and Gold Star Annuity Benefits.

The SFY 2015-16 budget appropriated \$730,000 under State Operations funding and \$799,000 under Aid To Localities funding for these purposes. In addition, the appropriation also provides for the funding of administrative personnel and operational expenses.

##### **a. New York State Supplemental Burial Benefits**

New York State offers a supplemental burial benefits program to eligible families of military personnel killed in combat or on duty subject to hostile fire or imminent danger, as defined in 37 U.S.C. Section 310(a) (4).

In the SFY 2015-16 budget included \$400,000 for this program.

##### **b. Gold Star Parents**

These parents, who have lost children to the ravages of war, are unable to rely upon their children in their twilight years.

This appropriation supports the payment of a \$500 annuity for the Gold Star Parent. Up to two parents may claim this annual benefit.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$599,000 for the payment of the Gold Star Parent annuities.

**B. Division of Military and Naval Affairs  
New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center**

The New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center is located in Saratoga Springs, New York.

In the budget for SFY 2015-16, \$241,000 was included for operating expenses. Also, \$1,000,000 was appropriated for services and expenses related to youth academic and drug demand reduction programs, the New York Guard, the New York Naval Militia, the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, and the preservation and restoration of historic artifacts.

**C. New York State Higher Education Services Corporation  
Veterans' and Military-Related Tuition Awards Programs**

Currently, there are three awards programs available to veterans under the jurisdiction of the New York State Higher Education Service Corporation: the Veterans Tuition Awards, The Military Enhanced Recognition Incentive and Tribute, and the New York State Regents Awards for Children of Deceased and Disabled Veterans. The Veterans Tuition Awards provides tuition payments up to the undergraduate cost of education at the State University of New York, for veterans who served in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf and who have earned an Expeditionary Medal. The Military Enhanced Recognition Incentive and Tribute (MERIT) is a financial aid program for children, spouses, and financial dependents of veterans who were New York State residents while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces or state-organized militia at any time after August 2, 1990 and died, became severely and permanently disabled, or were classified as missing in action in a combat zone. The New York State Regents Awards for Children of Deceased and Disabled Veterans provides \$450 per year to students whose parents served in the U.S. Armed Forces and died, as a result of service, or were discharged and suffered a forty percent or more disability as a result of such service.

In the SFY 2015-16 budget, \$66,021,000 was appropriated to cover the entire cost associated with the State's many scholarship programs, including the veterans' and military-related programs.

**D. Department of Mental Health  
Office of Mental Health**

**Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program**

The PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program, which provides “peer-to-peer,” counseling between veterans who personally understand the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), it operates in four test counties: Suffolk, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Jefferson.

In the SFY 2015-2016 budget, \$3.2 million was appropriated to fund the four test counties, as well as seven additional counties: Nassau, Erie, Onondaga, Orange, Monroe, Niagara, and Westchester.

**E. Department of Family Assistance  
Office of Children and Families**

**American Legion Boys State Program**

Boys State of the American Legion is the Leadership Action Program wherein qualified male high school juniors participate in a practical government course designed to develop a working knowledge of government. The New York State program is held each summer at Morrisville State College. Young men with outstanding qualifications in leadership, character, scholarship, service, and citizenship who have a serious attitude toward an intensive citizenship training program are selected to participate.

The SFY 2015-16 budget included \$50,000 for this youth program. This was a legislative addition to the budget proposed by the executive.

## **IV. BILLS THAT PASSED THE ASSEMBLY ONLY**

### **A. Veterans' Affairs Committee**

#### **1. Services Available to Veterans (A. 5514 Cusick; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would require all subdivisions of the State to inquire, when dealing with a client or customer, whether he or she or a family member is a veteran and then to inform veterans and their families of the services and opportunities made available by the Division of Veterans' Affairs. Any new forms created after the effective date of this act would contain the following questions: "Have you served in the United States Armed Forces?" and "Has someone in your family served in the United States military?"

#### **2. Interagency Council (A. 4789 Ramos; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would establish an Interagency Coordinating Council for service-disabled veterans to provide accessible, coordinated, and specialized services from multiple state and local agencies to service-disabled veterans.

#### **3. Military Sexual Trauma (A. 7260 Russell; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs to develop plans and benefits to assist veterans who have suffered Military Sexual Trauma (MST) while on active duty or during military training. It would require the county and city veterans' service agencies to provide information on programs to assist this special veteran population.

#### **4. Information on Mental Health Assistance (A. 1945 Fahy; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would require information on where veterans can seek help for military sexual trauma, to be posted on the websites of the Division of Veterans' Affairs and the Office of Mental Health.

#### **5. Homeless Veterans Report (A. 434 Rozić; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs in consultation with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Department of Labor, and Office of Children and Families to determine the number and perform an analysis of homeless persons in New York State that are veterans.

**6. Expansion of the Cold War Veterans' Exemption  
(A. 3379 Cusick; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would expand the Cold War Veterans' Exemption to taxes levied by local school districts. It would allow those districts to conduct a public hearing regarding the tax exemption and after the public hearing, the governing body of the school district could pass a resolution to provide the tax exemption. Qualified veterans living within a school district that has passed the resolution would have the same tax exemption from their school districts as they receive from their local tax district.

**7. Peer to Peer Counseling for Veterans  
(A. 6114 Ortiz; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would create a peer-to-peer counselor program for veterans who are suffering from mental illness, alcohol abuse, and chemical dependence.

**8. Information on Special Veterans Populations  
(A. 2357-A Lavine; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would require information regarding specific mental and physical health issues including: post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, any other brain-injuries and spinal bifida, to be included on the New York State Department of Health's website through the Veterans' Health Care Information Program. The measure would require the Department of Corrections and Community Services to collect the military background and circumstances of persons subject to their jurisdiction.

**B. Insurance Committee**

**Mandatory Health Insurance Coverage of Prosthetic Devices  
(A.7545B Crespo; Passed Assembly)**

This bill would require that health insurance that provides medical, major medical, or similar comprehensive type coverage include coverage for prosthetic devices for veterans of the armed forces who are residents of New York when such devices are deemed medically necessary for the patient's rehabilitation.

## **V. BILLS REPORTED BY OTHER COMMITTEES THAT BECAME LAW**

### **A. Election Law Committee**

#### **Elimination of “Inmate” When Referring Veterans at Veterans Health Administration Hospitals**

**(Chapter 375 of the Laws of 2015; A. 3601, Dinowitz)**

This measure modifies the Election Law to correct the designation of veterans in absentee voting procedures to read as a “resident or patient of a veteran’s health administration hospital” which more aptly describes the situation of these individuals upon requesting and submitting an absentee ballot.

### **B. Governmental Employees Committee**

#### **Military Service Exams**

**New York State Division of Veterans’ Affairs, Departmental Bill#40**

**(Chapter 404 of the Laws of 2015; A. 7824, Abbate)**

This bill extends the option of a make-up examination to all service members who miss a New York State Civil Service exam due to a call to any form of active duty military service.

### **C. Transportation Committee**

#### **Prohibition of Additional Fee for Veteran’s Distinguished Mark**

**(Chapter 149 of the Laws of 2015; A.6557, Jean-Pierre)**

This Chapter ensures that no veteran pays a fee for the inclusion of a “veteran” notation on his or her driver’s license or non-driver identification card. Section two of this bill directs the Department of Motor Vehicles to begin issuing refunds of fees already paid by applicants for adding this distinguished mark.

## **VI. HONORING VETERANS THROUGH LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS**

### **Urging the New York State Congressional Delegation to Support the Passage of the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 (H.R. 1769/S.901) (Resolution No. 363, DenDekker)**

The federal legislation known as the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 would establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs a national center for research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of the descendants of veterans exposed to toxic substances during their service. The bill would also establish an advisory board to oversee and assess the national center and to advise the federal VA regarding the center's work. A database of birth defects and anomalies both structural and nonstructural would be developed as well. This resolution urges the New York State Congressional Delegation to pass H.R. 1769/S.901, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015.

### **Commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Surrender of General Robert E. Lee to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, to be Observed on April 9, 2015 (Resolution No. 306, Blackenbush)**

This historic event of the surrender of General Robert E. Lee to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia signified the end of the United States Civil War. This resolution acknowledges not only certain extraordinary individuals but all remarkable and courageous individuals who served on either side of the battle, risked their own lives for others, and stood with fortitude and humanity. This resolution commemorates the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Surrender of General Lee to General Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia.

#### **A. Commemorating the Centennial of the United States Navy Reserve (Resolution No. 516, DenDekker)**

The Naval Appropriation Act of 1916, dated March 3, 1915, established a United States Naval Reserve. Navy reservists serve as a highly trained force available to meet the expanding needs of the active duty Navy. Navy reservists must meet the same qualifications as those on active duty. They serve side by side with active duty counterparts on station, on shore, in the air, at sea and on the drill deck. The role and responsibilities of reservists factor heavily into the role of the United States Navy. This resolution commemorates the Centennial of the United States Navy Reserve.

#### **B. Commemorating Memorial Day, Monday, May 25, 2015 (Resolution No. 552, DenDekker)**

A legacy of the Civil War, Memorial Day is a day of national mourning of those Americans who gave their lives in the defense of their country in times of war and times of peace, in police actions and minor skirmishes, in peacetime roles and missions to foreign lands to uphold the cherished principles of liberty and democracy,

upon which the United States was founded. New York State was the first State to formally recognize Memorial Day, then known as Decoration Day, as a holiday to honor our fallen veterans. Memorial Day is not a celebration, but a day of taking time out for remembrance as characterized by our ancestors, who observed the day by taking time out to remember family members, relatives and neighbors who lost their lives in the Civil War. The resolution commemorates Memorial Day, May 25, 2015.

**C. Celebrating the Life of Pat Toro, Former President of Queens Vietnam (Resolution No. 239, Miller)**

Pat Toro, the former President of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 32 in Queens, New York, died on July 3, 2014 at the age of 65, from myelodysplastic syndrome, a blood cancer arising from exposure to Agent Orange while serving his country in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970. Mr. Toro was a decorated Vietnam War Marine Corps veteran, who worked in the New York Police Department and retired as a Port Authority criminal investigator. Pat Toro served as the Vietnam Veterans of America New York State Council Southern District Leader and as Director of the Vietnam Veterans of America National Board of Directors. Pat was particularly well-known for his campaign to prevent indigent veterans from being buried in unmarked graves at Potters Field without proper recognition of their sacrifice and service to their country. This resolution honors the memory of Pat Toro and his legacy of contribution to our communities, our State and our Nation,

**D. Mourning the Death of Alton H. Carpenter, Distinguished Citizen and Devoted Member of His Community (Resolution No. 542, DenDekker)**

Alton H. Carpenter was honorably discharged from not one, but two branches of the United States Armed Forces, including the United States Army Air Corps for service during World War II and the U.S. Air Force for service during the Korean War. Mr. Carpenter retired in January of 1983 as a Senior Systems Analyst with the Bendix Corporation. He moved to Albany, New York and accepted the position of Administration Assistance to the Adjutant of The American Legion, Department of New York, until his retirement in 2012. Alton H. Carpenter served as The American Legion Department of New York Commander for the year 1981-1982. At the time of his death, Mr. Carpenter was a consultant to the American Legion Department of New York Legislative Committee. This resolution mourns the death of Alton H. Carpenter, distinguished citizen and devoted member of the community.

## **VII. HONORING SERVICEMEN AND SERVICE WOMEN THROUGH LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION**

### **A. Honoring Cadet 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Santino Montanez Upon the Occasion of His Designation of the Billy Mitchell Award on May 25, 2015 (Resolution No. 696, Santabarbara)**

The Billy Mitchell Award was established in 1964 to honor the late General Billy Mitchell, an aviation pioneer and staunch supporter of an independent Air Force for the United States. To achieve this honor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Santino Montanez of the Civil Air Patrol, which is the United States Air Force Auxiliary, passed a series of leadership, aerospace, and physical fitness tests. He also attended character development training for each achievement from Cadet Airman Basic through Cadet Chief Master Sergeant. This resolution honors Cadet 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Montanez upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of the Billy Mitchell Award.

### **B. Mourning the Untimely Death of Staff Sergeant Michael Harold Ollis, of Staten Island, New York, and Paying Tribute To His Courageous Actions As A Member of the United States Army (Resolution No. 708, Malliotakis)**

Assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, Staff Sergeant Michael Harold Ollis died on August 28, 2013, in eastern Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom, at the age of 24. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star, the military's third highest decoration, for his valor and bravery while saving the life of a Polish officer. In addition, he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Polish Armed Forces from the Polish government, and the Veterans of Foreign War Oakwood Heights Post, was renamed in his honor. This resolution mourns the untimely death of Staff Sergeant Ollis of Staten Island, New York, and pays tribute to his courageous actions as a member of the United States Army.

## **VIII. MEMORIALIZING THE GOVERNOR TO PROCLAIM VETERAN-RELATED EVENTS**

### **A. Memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to Proclaim March 17, 2015, as 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day in the State of New York (Resolution No. 176, Russell)**

Fort Drum is located in Jefferson County, in Northern New York, and is the largest military installation in the Northeastern United States. Fort Drum is named for Lieutenant General Hugh Drum, former commander of First Army and an early leader of the State's volunteer militia, the New York Guard. For 30 years, Fort Drum has been home to the United States Army 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. 323 brave men and women who were members of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and based at Fort Drum gave their lives in the cause of defeating global terrorism. This resolution memorializes Governor Cuomo to proclaim March 17, 2015, as 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day in the State of New York.

### **B. Memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to Proclaim May 6, 2015, as West Point Day in the State of New York (Resolution No.476, Skoufis)**

By an act of Congress on March 16, 1802, the United States Military Academy was established within the borders of New York State, on the banks of the Hudson River. Sixty-three years ago, the late James T. McNamara, then a member of the New York State Assembly and a member of the Academy's Class of 1939, was the author of the State legislature's first "West Point Day" resolution. This resolution memorializes Governor Cuomo to proclaim May 6, 2015, as West Point Day in the State of New York.

### **C. Memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to Proclaim June 10, 2015, as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day in the State of New York (Resolution No.688, Miller)**

According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the purpose of PTSD Awareness Day is to raise awareness of PTSD and effective treatments to help people affected by PTSD. According to studies by the RAND Institute, at least 20% of service men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD and/or depression. This resolution memorializes Governor Cuomo to proclaim June 10, 2015, as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day in the State of New York.

## **IX. OTHER ACTIVITIES BY THE VETERANS COMMITTEE**

### **A. Subcommittee on Women Veterans**

The Subcommittee on Women Veterans sponsored the 21st annual Women Veterans Recognition Day, held on June 10, 2015. This year the Subcommittee honored women veterans who served our country by hosting a luncheon to discuss issues that impact female members of the military. Those who attended reflected on their time spent in the military, their experiences as women in the United States Armed Forces, problems they have encountered since their time in military service, and how the State can communicate with women veterans to provide answers to their questions and concerns.

The Assembly adopted two resolutions and one piece of legislation during this special event in the Assembly Chamber.

1. Assembly Resolution No. 664 by Assemblywoman Addie Russell, the Chair of the Subcommittee on Women Veterans, was adopted memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim June 12, 2015, as Women Veterans Recognition Day in the State of New York. June 12 marks the 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Harry S Truman signing into law the Women's Armed Services Act of 1948, assuring that women would have a permanent place in the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines.
2. Assembly Resolution No. 562 by Assemblywoman Russell urged the New York State Congressional delegation to support the passage of the Women Veterans Access to Quality Care Act of 2015, S. 471. This federal legislation would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish standards to ensure that all medical facilities of the VA have the structural characteristics necessary to adequately meet the gender-specific health care needs of veterans at such facilities, including privacy, safety, and dignity. All VA health care facilities would be required to have a full-time obstetrician and/or gynecologist on staff under this measure.
3. Military Sexual Trauma  
(A. 7260 Russell; Passed Assembly)

This bill would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs to develop plans and benefits to assist veterans who have suffered Military Sexual Trauma (MST) while on active duty or during military training. It would require the county and city veterans' service agencies to provide information on programs to assist this special population.

## **B. Public Hearing and Roundtable**

On November 17, 2015, the New York State Assembly Standing Committees on Veterans' Affairs, Social Services and the Subcommittee on Women Veterans held a public hearing in Albany, New York to review the current State veterans' benefits that were funded in the SFY 2015-16 budget and the ways veterans and family members are informed of the benefits that they earned. The Division of Veterans' Affairs and several organizations that have programs dedicated to veterans gave testimony before the committee.

## **C. Assembly Chamber Veterans Related Events**

### **1. Medal of Honor Recipients Honored**

On Tuesday, June 2, 2015, President Barack Obama held a Medal of Honor presentation ceremony for two award recipients from the State of New York. On this same day, the New York State Assembly adopted two resolutions to honor these special awardees.

#### **Assembly Resolution No. 604, Speaker Heastie**

This resolution honored Sergeant William Shemin posthumously upon the occasion of receiving the prestigious Medal of Honor. Sgt. Shemin, born in Bayonne, NJ, enlisted in the United States Army on October 2, 1917. On August 7-9, 1918, William Shemin participated in the Aisne-Marne Offensive, where he took shrapnel and was wounded by a machine gun bullet which pierced his helmet and lodged behind his left ear; he left the cover of his platoon's trench and crossed open spaces, repeatedly exposing himself to heavy machine gun and rifle fire in an effort to rescue his fellow soldiers who were wounded. After officers and senior noncommissioned officers had become casualties, Shemin took command of the platoon and displayed great initiative under fire until he was wounded August 9. He was honorably discharged in August 1919 and started a greenhouse and landscaping business in Bronx, New York.

#### **Assembly Resolution No. 605, Honorable Fahy**

This resolution honored Sergeant Henry Johnson posthumously upon the occasion Johnson put himself in harm's way by advancing from his position to engage an enemy soldier in hand-to-hand combat, displaying great courage, and he held back the enemy forces until they retreated. Henry Johnson was promoted to Sergeant later in May 1918 and became the first American in any conflict to receive the Croix de Guerre, France's highest military decoration. At the end of World War I, Johnson returned to upstate New York; he died in Albany, New York and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

## **2. 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day in the State of New York**

On March 17, 2015 soldiers and officers from Fort Drum were in Albany for the fourth annual “10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day” in the State Capitol. The mission was to highlight the special relationship between the State and the United States Army. Officers and soldiers from Fort Drum as well as members of the Fort Drum Regional Liaison Organization were introduced in the Chamber. In the Well and hallways leading into the Legislative Office Building, several pieces of army equipment were displayed and demonstrated by various soldiers stationed at Fort Drum.

## **X. OUTLOOK FOR 2016**

The Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs is looking forward to a productive year in 2016. The Committee will continue to work with the Division of Veterans' Affairs, the Division of Military and Naval Affairs, other State agencies, veterans' organizations, and individual veterans throughout New York State to develop programs and services to assist the veterans of this state.

The issues that the Committee intends to pursue include the following:

- outreach to older veterans;
- continued establishment of veterans' mental health and outreach programs to help veterans in need of specific care related to mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and substance abuse;
- increased awareness of mental health treatment programs for those veterans who suffer from Military Sexual Trauma;
- increased outreach to women veterans to better identify and respond to their needs; and
- outreach to recently discharged veterans.

The Committee will continue to strive to address the needs of New York State's more than one million veterans and their families.

**APPENDIX A**

**SUMMARY OF ACTION ON ALL BILLS REFERRED TO THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

<b>Final Action</b>	<b>Assembly Bills</b>	<b>Senate Bills</b>	<b>Total Bills</b>
<b>Bills Reported With or Without Amendments</b>			
To Floor; Not Returning to Committee	3	0	3
To Ways and Means	12	0	12
To Codes	0	0	0
To Rules	3	0	3
To Judiciary	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Bills Having Committee Reference Changed</b>			
To	0	0	0
To	0	0	0
To	0	0	0
To	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Senate Bills Substituted or Recalled</b>			
Substituted	0	0	0
Recalled	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Bills Defeated in Committee</b>	0	0	0
Bills Held for Consideration With a Roll-Call Vote	0	0	0
Bills Never Reported, Held in Committee	61	13	74
Bills Having Enacting Clauses Stricken	1	0	1
Motions to Discharge Lost	0	0	0
Total Bills in Committee	80	13	93
Total Number of Committee Meetings Held	5		

**APPENDIX B**

**BILLS THAT PASSED BOTH HOUSES AND WERE SIGNED INTO LAW**

<b>BILL No.</b>	<b>SPONSOR</b>	<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
A. 2646	Bronson	538	This law would allow a county or city having a population of one million or more persons to adopt a local law, ordinance or resolution to allow an assessor to transfer the exemption, on a pro-rated basis, of a veteran who moves to a new housing unit within the same county or city having a population of one million or more persons.
A. 7229-A	DenDekker	414	This law would expand the categories of veterans eligible for admission to the New York State Veterans' Home program under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health.
A. 7867-A	DenDekker	579	For any veteran who dies without sufficient funds, insurance or a designated next of kin, the county of residence or City of New York may request a congressional chartered veterans' organization to conduct funeral and burial services. The State under this measure, shall reimburse such organizations for such expenses, at a maximum of \$2,000, exclusive of state and federal expenses which are already covered.

A. 4487-A	Ramos	523	This law would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs to include an accounting of the number of veteran-owned small businesses in the State of New York in its annual report to the Governor and the members of the Legislature. This information would detail both small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans and service disabled veteran-owned business enterprises.
A. 6101	Kaminsky	400	The Vietnam Veterans of America are declared a "benevolent order" under this law thus granting such organization various benefits available to specified veterans' organizations.
A. 6223-A	Thiele	381	This law creates an additional local option to increase the maximum exemptions allowed under the alternative veterans' exemptions and the Cold War veterans' exemption. The increase in the maximum allowed exemption amount shall apply only to local laws adopted on or after the effective date, January 2, 2016.

**APPENDIX C**

**BILLS THAT PASSED THE ASSEMBLY ONLY**

<b>BILL NO.</b>	<b>SPONSOR</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
A.5514	Cusick	Would inform veterans and their families of the many services and opportunities provided by the Division of Veterans' Affairs.
A.4789	Ramos	Would establish a New York State Interagency coordinating council for service-disabled veterans to provide accessible, coordinated, and specialized services from multiple state and local agencies to disabled veterans.
A.1945	Fahy	Would require information on where veterans can seek help for those who have experienced military sexual trauma while on active duty or during military training on the websites of the Division of Veterans' Affairs and the Office of Mental Health.
A.6114	Ortiz	Would create a peer-to-peer counselor program for veterans who are suffering from mental illness, alcohol abuse, and chemical dependence.
A.7260	Russell	Would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs to develop programs to address military sexual trauma and also would require the county and city veterans' service agencies to provide information on matters pertaining to military sexual trauma.
A.434	Rozic	Would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs in consultation with the Office of Temporary and

		Disability Assistance, Department of Labor and Office of Children and Families to determine the number of homeless persons in New York State that are veterans.
A.2357-A	Lavine	Would require information regarding specific mental and physical health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, any other brain-injuries and spinal bifida to be included on the New York State Department of Health's website through the Veterans' Health Care Information Program. The measure would require the Department of Corrections and Community Service to collect the military background and circumstances of persons subject to their jurisdiction.
A.3379	Cusick	Would expand the Cold War Veterans' Exemption so that it could apply to taxes levied by local school districts if the school district elected to do so.
A.2368-A	Barrett	Would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs, in consultation with the Department of Taxation and Finance, pursuant to its training responsibilities, within thirty days of this act and at least annually, to reinforce and/or remind assessors of the fact that the Persian Gulf conflict referenced in section 458-a of the real property tax law includes, but is not limited to, hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq.