

New York State Assembly

Annual 2024 Report

**Committee on
Veterans' Affairs**



**Speaker Carl E. Heastie
Kimberly Jean-Pierre, Chair**



KIMBERLY JEAN-PIERRE
Assemblywoman 11th District
Suffolk County

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Task Force on Women's Issues

December 15, 2024

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

Dear Speaker Heastie,

It is with great pleasure that I forward to you the 2024 Annual Report of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Several significant pieces of legislation became law this year, including legislation to require each State agency to designate at least one employee as a veteran's liaison (Chapter 447) and the creation of the Alex R. Jimenez New York State Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program (Chapter 625). The Committee also held a public hearing with the Assembly Standing Committee on Local Governments to examine the quality and effectiveness of representation in veterans' benefits claims before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

While I am proud of the work we completed in 2024, much more remains. In the coming year, the Committee will focus on how to best connect veterans to services - including county-level services, mental and behavioral health options, and New York's outdoor resources. The Committee also will continue to examine issues related to older veterans, women veterans, homeless veterans, and employment.

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

Sincerely,

Kimberly Jean-Pierre
Chair, New York State Assembly Veterans' Affairs Committee

**2024 ANNUAL REPORT
NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

Honorable Kimberly Jean-Pierre, Chair

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I. COMMITTEE JURISDICTION AND SUMMARY

The Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs evaluates legislation affecting the more than 650,000 New York State residents who unselfishly served their nation in the United States armed forces, including over 60,000 women. 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 several chapters of New York State statute, principally the Veterans' Services Law, Civil Service Law, Executive Law, Military Law, Education Law, Real Property Tax Law, Public Health Law, and the 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, educational assistance for certain veterans and their family members, a state veterans cemetery in the Finger Lakes and State veterans' nursing homes. This past legislative session, the Committee held four Committee meetings at which it considered 11 bills. Nine bills passed both houses of the Legislature, seven were signed into law by the Governor and the remaining two were vetoed.

While the Committee has jurisdiction over legislation that affects veterans' benefits and programs that help veterans and their families, the Committee does not work alone. Some veterans' initiatives are referred to other standing committees, and in those cases the Committee Chair, members, and staff work closely with those committees to ensure that this unique population's needs are met.

II. 2024 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

A. Chapter Amendments

When the Legislature revisits a law soon after its passage to make technical amendments the resulting bills are referred to as “chapter amendments.” The Committee considered one chapter amendment this year:

Free Use of State Parks for Veterans and Gold Star Family Members (A.8568 Jean-Pierre; Chapter 103 of the Laws of 2024)

Chapter 616 of the Laws of 2023 expanded free access to state parks to all veterans and Gold Star family members. This chapter amendment clarified the definition of “veteran” and “member of a Gold Star Family” to ensure effective implementation of the legislation.

B. Deceased Veterans

Annual Adjustment for Reimbursement of Certain Veterans Funerals (A.4613-C Jean-Pierre; Chapter 450 of the Laws of 2024)

Starting in 2025, this law will require the Commissioner of Veterans’ Services to provide an annual increase in the maximum amount a veteran service organization can be reimbursed for paying the funeral and burial expenses of indigent veterans. The increase will be a percentage determined by a formula based on increases in the consumer price index.

C. Department of Veterans’ Services

Alex R. Jimenez New York State Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program (A.8837-C Cruz; Chapter 625 of the Laws of 2024)

This law establishes a program within the Office for New Americans, with the cooperation of the Department of Veterans’ Services and the Division of Military and Naval Affairs, to assist non-citizen active-duty uniformed service members, veterans, reserve component members and their family members, to secure American citizenship and legal immigration status in the United States.

Searchable Database of Veterans Resources (A.7701-A Jean-Pierre; Veto 37)

This legislation would direct DVS to establish and maintain a database of resources available to veterans, members of the uniformed services, and their families. The database would include information about resources related to veterans’ benefits, healthcare, housing, employment, veteran-owned businesses, survivor benefits, substance use disorder treatment, physical disabilities, educational and job benefits, tuition assistance programs, health and mental health referrals, real property tax exemptions, suicide prevention, and peer outreach and support.

Veterans' Healthcare Study

(A.4201-B Stern; Veto 25)

This legislation would require DVS, in consultation with the Department of Health, to complete a comprehensive study regarding veteran healthcare by the end of 2025. Specifically, the study would examine the healthcare needs of veterans and their families, whether existing services and resources are adequate to meet those needs and ways to improve their access to affordable, quality healthcare.

Maternity Care Coordination Program for Pregnant and Postpartum Veterans

(A.8162-A Cunningham; Chapter 623 of the Laws of 2024)

This law requires the Department of Veterans' Services to develop and implement a maternity care program in consultation with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the state Department of Health, and the Office of the Mental Health to improve the capacity of maternity care providers to address the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans.

E. Miscellaneous

Veterans Liaisons in State Agencies

(A.7173 Jean-Pierre; Chapter 447 of the Laws of 2024)

The purpose of this law is to require each State agency to designate at least one employee within the agency as a veteran's liaison. The liaison will provide information and assistance to veterans regarding benefits and services available at the liaison's State agency, other State agencies and the Department of Veterans' Services.

Removing Wartime Requirement for Certain Veterans' Benefits

(A.4611-B Jean-Pierre; Chapter 445 of the Laws of 2024)

This law removes the requirement that a veteran must have served during wartime to be granted certain veterans' benefits.

Veterans Benefits Information

(A.9850 Jean-Pierre; Chapter 449 of the Laws of 2024)

Chapter 602 of the Laws of 2021 amended Article 17 of the Executive Law to require that veterans who request a notation on their driver's license or non-driver's identification card be advised that DVS and local veteran service agencies offer assistance with accessing state and federal veterans' benefits. In 2023, Article 17 of the Executive Law was repealed and recodified as the Veterans' Service Law. This law makes a technical amendment to ensure that changes made by the 2021 chapter are included in the Veterans' Services Law and updates certain references in the Vehicle and Traffic Law to reflect that the "Division of Veterans' Services" is now the Department of Veterans' Services.

III. BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

A. New York State Department of Veterans' Services

The DVS assists, counsels, and advocates for veterans, military personnel, and their families. The enacted State Budget contains an All-Funds appropriation of \$34 million, an increase of \$3.5 million above the Executive Budget proposal.

Veterans' Benefits Advising Program

The Veterans' Benefits Advising Program provides counseling and services through a statewide network of State veteran counselors. The counselors, all of whom are veterans, help veterans complete and file applications for state, federal, and private benefits, and services. Counselors also serve veterans through outreach to U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) medical centers, State and local veterans' nursing homes, senior centers, and public assistance offices. State veteran counselors help ensure that active-duty military personnel and their families receive the benefits to which they are entitled. State veteran counselors receive professional training in veterans' benefits counseling and are accredited by the VA. DVS also offers training and continuing education to veterans service officers of city and county Veterans Service Agencies who provide benefits advising at the local level. The State Budget for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$18,431,000, which is an increase of \$1,899,000 from the prior fiscal year and includes both State Operation and Aid to Localities funding.

Veterans' Education Program

The Veterans' Education Program is operated by DVS. With offices located in Albany and New York City, the Program investigates and approves post-secondary educational and vocational institutions to determine eligibility to enroll students using the GI Bill and other VA education benefits, including approval of on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$2,221,000 for this program.

Administration Programs

DVS Administration Programs include Supplemental Burial Benefits, Gold Star Parents Annuity, and the operation of a State Veterans Cemetery:

- *New York State Supplemental Burial Benefits*
New York State offers a supplemental burial benefits program for eligible families of military personnel killed in combat or who died of wounds incurred in combat. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$400,000 for these benefits.
- *Gold Star Parents*
Gold Star Parents have lost their children in the armed services during a time of war or conflict. This appropriation supports the payment of annuities to each Gold Star Parent. In 2024, the annuity amount was \$588.20. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$599,000 for these annuities.
- *State Veterans' Cemetery Operations*

The SFY 2024-25 State Budget included \$900,000 for contractual services related to veteran's cemetery operations.

Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance Program

The Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance Program provides legally blind wartime veterans or surviving un-remarried spouses of such veterans who live in New York with an annuity. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$6,380,000.

Burial Services for Indigent Veterans Chapter 579 of the Laws of 2015 and Chapter 29 of the Laws of 2016 were enacted to provide dignified burials to indigent veterans. When a veteran dies leaving no next of kin and insufficient funds to pay for a burial, the City of New York and counties outside the city, are required to request congressionally chartered veterans' organizations to engage the services of a funeral firm to conduct funeral and burial services. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included a sub-allocation of \$100,000 to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to reimburse veterans' organizations for providing these burial services for indigent veterans.

Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund

The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included \$500,000 to assist veterans who are confronting emergency housing needs and lacking sufficient money to cover the immediate costs.

Capital Projects

The Veterans' Nonprofit Capital Program (VNCP)

The Legislature first authorized VNCP with an appropriation of \$5 million in 2022 to fund grants for capital improvements to facilities owned or controlled by veteran nonprofit organizations. Thus far over \$3.7 million in grants has been awarded to veterans' organizations throughout the State. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 reappropriated the remainder of the funding to ensure that grants can continue to be available.

State Veterans' Cemetery Operation-Finger Lakes

The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included \$2,000,000 appropriation for the design, construction, and operation of the State veterans' cemetery. The cemetery also received \$2,000,000 in federal funds for costs associated with design and construction, and maintenance and operations.

Aid to Localities

County and City Veterans' Service Agencies

County and city Veterans' Service Agencies (VSAs) are mandated by State law to assist active-duty armed forces, reserves, organized militia, veterans, and their families in matters relating to federal, state, and local veterans' benefits and services. The State Budget for SFY 2024-2025 included an appropriation of \$2.38 million for VSAs.

Monroe County Veterans' Outreach Center, Inc.

The Monroe County Veterans' Outreach Center in Rochester, New York, is the nation's oldest community-based outreach center, serving veterans of all eras. The Outreach Center provides counseling services for successful reintegration of veterans into the community, short-term psychological counseling, residential programs for homeless veterans, and an alternative to incarceration program through the Monroe County Veterans' Treatment Court. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$250,000 for the services and expenses related to the Veterans' Outreach Center, Inc, which was part of the Executive Budget proposal, and an additional \$100,000, which was added by the Legislature for this vital program.

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

SAGE has established a comprehensive program for New York State's elderly LGBT veterans that provides legal counsel, benefits advocacy, and enhanced wraparound services to improve veterans' income security and overall well-being. The SAGE program provides assistance to LGBT veterans, including helping them to navigate the federal discharge upgrade process. The State Budget for SFY 2024-2025 included an appropriation of \$200,000 for SAGE. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Legal Services of the Hudson Valley and Military Families Project

The Veterans and Military Families Advocacy Project of 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. The Project covers more than 120,000 veterans living in Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, and Westchester counties. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included appropriations of \$405,000. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

New York State Defenders Association Veterans Defense Program

The Veterans Defense Program (VDP) helps the most vulnerable veterans by facilitating treatment and assisting defense attorneys who represent veterans with mental health issues. The New York State Defenders Association provides training and expert legal assistance to attorneys in 120 county public defenders offices, legal aid agencies, and assigned counsel staff. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$500,000 for this Program and an additional \$220,000 for an expansion to include Long Island. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Helmets to Hardhats

Helmets to Hardhats assists transitioning active-duty military service members, veterans, reserves, and national guard members, in gaining employment with the building trades. The Helmets to Hardhats Program has been actively placing military veterans in building-trades affiliated apprenticeship programs in the state since 2013. The program fills a void in conventional services available to veterans by streamlining the pathway for veterans seeking to enter the construction trade. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$300,000 to facilitate the Program's statewide expansion. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Veteran-to-Veteran Support Services

The concept of Veteran Treatment Courts started in Buffalo, New York. Currently, there are 34 courts statewide to address the needs of veterans involved in the criminal justice system due to addiction, PTSD, brain injuries, or mental illness. These special courts help veterans by linking them with community and governmental services and support. A key component of these courts are the veterans who serve as volunteer mentors to the defendants. Mentors provide support and motivation and help veterans not only to navigate the criminal justice system but also to reintegrate into civilian society.

The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$1 million for the following purposes: to establish and support veterans treatment courts, to support veteran-to-veteran programs maintained by veterans' service organizations; to connect veteran defendants to treatment and support services directed by the criminal justice system; to support such treatment and support services; to provide services to support veterans to avoid involvement with the criminal justice system; to support programs providing counseling and advocacy activities for veterans; and, to provide assistance in securing benefits at the national, state, and local level. Funds will be made available pursuant to a plan prepared by the DVS and approved by the Director of the Budget.

Justice for Heroes Initiatives

The unmet demand for legal services for veterans and service members remains significant. The Justice for Heroes Initiative is a competitive grant program among the State's law school clinics to provide free legal assistance to veterans and their family members. The clinics provide assistance including foreclosure prevention, consumer protection matters, family law, discharge upgrades, and complex appeals regarding VA benefits. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 allocated \$250,000 for this initiative. Language was added at the request of the Assembly requiring the Department of Veterans' Services to submit an annual report to the Legislature detailing the law schools that received funds, the number of veterans served, and the services provided.

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Department of New York

VFW is a congressionally chartered veterans service organization. VFW veteran service officers help veterans navigate the various benefits available on the federal, state, and local level. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$125,000 for the services and expenses of the VFW Department of New York. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Clear Path for Veterans

Clear Path for Veterans' mission is to assist service members, veterans, and their families through supportive wellness-enhancing programs and services in a safe, respectful environment, to transition to civilian life. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$325,000 for the services and expenses of this organization. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Legal Services New York City (LSNYC) Veterans Justice Project (VJP)

The Veterans Justice Project (VJP) provides civil legal services to low-income veterans, service members and their families struggling with housing stability and economic security. VJP offers assistance for the following issues: HUD-VA supportive housing; evictions; foreclosures; unemployment insurance denials; debt collection/wage garnishment; child support; wills and powers of attorney; divorce; custody; special education, and Social Security Disability/Social Security Income. Since VJP was launched in 2011, at least 14,600 veterans and their family members have been assisted. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$200,000 for services and expenses of the VJP at LSNYC. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

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. Since its founding, the mission of VVA has expanded to help all generations of veterans. VVA's New York State Council provides assistance in navigating the various benefits available to veterans of all eras and conflicts, and their family members. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an allocation of \$100,000 for the VVA New York State Council. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Outdoor RX Program

In 2020, the Outdoor Rx Act became law, requiring DVS, in consultation with several State agencies, to examine ways to provide veterans with increased opportunities for nature-based therapy and programs. In May 2021, DVS issued a report citing the need for increased research, including a study of State lands based on veterans' demographics, an examination of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. The State Budget for the SFY 2024-25 included \$100,000 for studies to be conducted by the NYS Department of Veterans' Services, Sierra Club Military Outdoors, Cornell University, and SUNY Cortland. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park

The Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park is a museum on the banks of the Buffalo River in Buffalo, NY. It features four decommissioned naval vessels that served in a variety of military conflicts in our nation's history. The Park also includes monuments and a maritime simulator. The State Budget for the SFY 2024-25 included \$100,000 for capital improvements. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Utica Center for Development

The Utica Center for Development's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) helps veterans and their families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness regain stability in permanent housing after experiencing a housing crisis. The Program assists participants by providing supportive services designed to resolve the immediate crisis and provide housing stability. The State Budget for the SFY 2024-25 included \$100,000. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

African American Veterans Memorial, Inc.

The African American Veterans Memorial is located at the Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park and is the first memorial to recognize the contributions of African Americans who served and are currently serving in all branches of the military. The State Budget for the SFY 2024-25 included \$500,000 for this memorial. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Enlisted for Life

Enlisted for Life is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help homeless veterans and at-risk veterans and their families. The State Budget for the SFY 2024-25 included \$100,000 for development of a center for services to provide temporary housing, education, meals, support for the homeless veteran population. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Touro University Law Center for Veterans' and Service Members Rights Clinic

The Touro University Law Center provides free legal services to veterans and service members. Priority is granted to matters that will prevent or relieve homelessness or remove barriers to reintegration of veterans into civilian life. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25

included \$80,000 for this program. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

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 the Saratoga Armory in Saratoga Springs, New York. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$189,000 for operating expenses. An additional \$1,000,000 is available for services and expenses related to youth academic and drug demand reduction programs, the New York Guard, the New York Naval Militia, the Veterans' Research Center and the preservation and restoration of historic artifacts, including \$720,000 for supplies and materials, \$180,000 for contractual services, and \$100,000 for equipment.

Recruitment Incentive & Retention Program (RIRP)

Chapter 289 of the Laws of 1996 established the Retirement Incentive & Retention Program was designed to recruit and retain members for the State Military Forces (Army National Guard, Air National Guard and the Naval Militia.) This is a competitive program. If approved for the RIRP, New York State will pay for college up to the current State University of New York (SUNY) maximum in-state undergraduate tuition per semester at any college, university, or community technical college in the State of New York. The college, university, or community technical college must be recognized by the New York State Board of Regents or State University of New York. The State Budget for the SFY 2024-25 \$3,300,000 for the program was appropriated.

C. Office of Mental Health

Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program

The Private First Class Joseph Dwyer Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program, which provides "peer-to peer" counseling by veterans who personally understand the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury, was first funded in the 2012 State Budget. It began operating in four test counties: Suffolk, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Jefferson. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 contained an appropriation of \$8 million and was expended to all counties and New York City.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a public health concern that affects all New Yorkers, but studies have shown that veterans experience a higher risk. The State Budget for SFY 2024-25 included \$1 million for services and expenses of suicide prevention efforts for veterans, first responders, law enforcement, and corrections officers. Another \$2 million was included in the State Budget for SFY 2024-25 for services and expenses of organizations related to suicide prevention, peer-to-peer training, and other mental health supports and services for veterans and first responders, including disaster relief workers.

D. Division of Criminal Justice Services

New York University's Veterans Entrepreneurship Training Program

The Veterans Entrepreneurship Training (VET) Program at New York University (NYU) was started by former Assembly Member Joseph Lentol and is designed for veterans who want to transition into entrepreneurship after completion of their military service. The program is open to veterans with early-stage companies or ideas for companies. Those in the program learn from academic experts and industry leaders through hands on experiential learning, mentorships, and capstone projects. Upon completion, graduates earn a VET Certificate from the Future Labs at NYU Tandon. The State Budget for 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$50,000 for this program. This is a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

E. New York State Urban Development Corporation

The Niagara Military Affairs Council advocates for the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS). This organization vows to protect 3,000 jobs at the Niagara Falls Station. The State Budget for 2024-25 included an appropriation of \$500,000.

IV. VETERAN-RELATED LAWS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Governmental Operations Committee

Guard Member Protections

(A.3710; Rajkumar; Chapter 337 of the Laws of 2024)

One limitation in the current New York State Military Law (Section 317) is that protections do not extend to Guard members of neighboring states who perform state active duty service. This law rectifies that oversight and provides employment protections during the performance of state active duty when the guard member lives in another state and is a member of their national guard but works for a New York company

Higher Education Committee

Expands Eligibility for the Veterans Tuition Program

(A.9205-A Buttenschon; Chapter 453 of the Laws of 2024)

This measure expands the eligibility requirement under the veteran's tuition awards (VTA) program to all New York veterans, regardless of combat service. Currently, VTA only provides benefits to combat veterans in an amount equal to undergraduate tuition charged to New York state residents by the State University of New York (SUNY) or, if lesser, actual tuition charged.

V. LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS

Honoring Veterans

Recognizing March 10, 2024, as Harriet Tubman Day (Resolution No. 921, Darling)

Known for her work with the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman served as a cook in the Union Army, a nurse, a scout for raiding parties, and a spy behind confederate lines during the Civil War. Tubman was buried in Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York, with full military honors. This resolution recognizes Harriet Tubman for her rich historical legacy and life achievements.

Honoring the Life of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker (Resolution No. 964, Buttenschon)

Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, born in Oswego, New York, worked as an unpaid field surgeon near the front lines at Fredericksburg and Chattanooga, and in September 1863 became the first female U.S. Army surgeon. In 1864, she was detained by Confederate troops and arrested for suspicion of spying but was eventually freed in a prisoner exchange. President Andrew Johnson signed a bill on November 11, 1865, to present her with the Medal of Honor for Meritorious Service. This resolution honors the life and legacy of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker.

Commemorating Honor Flight Network Serving Over 20,000 Veterans (Resolution No. 2051, Maher)

Established in 2005, the Honor Flight Network is a national nonprofit organization comprised of independent hubs working together to recognize and thank veterans by bringing them to the Nation's Capital to see the memorials commemorating their service. This resolution commemorates the Honor Flight Network upon the occasion of serving over 20,000 veterans from the Capital District in 2023.

Commemorating June 14, 2024, as Flag Day (Resolution No. 2153, Solages)

Flag Day was officially established by a proclamation of President Woodrow Wilson on May 30, 1916. While Flag Day was celebrated in various communities after Wilson's proclamation, it was not until August 3, 1949, that President Harry S. Truman signed an Act of Congress designating June 14th as Flag Day. This resolution commemorates June 14, 2024, as Flag Day.

Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Saratoga National Cemetery (Resolution No. 2239, Woerner)

Dedicated on July 9, 1999, as Saratoga National Cemetery, the Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery, located in Schuylerville, is New York State's sixth national veteran's cemetery and the 116th in the United States. There are three Medal of Honor recipients buried or memorialized at this National Cemetery. This resolution commemorates the 25th Anniversary of the dedication of the Cemetery.

Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Commissioning of the U.S.S. Slater DE766 (Resolution No. 2312, McDonald)

The commissioning of the U.S.S. SLATER DE766 occurred on May 1, 1944, in Tampa, Florida. The Slater was decommissioned on June 24, 1946, and is now a Destroyer Escort Historical Museum moored on the Hudson River in Albany, New York. The ship has been designated as a National Historic Landmark. This resolution commemorates the 80th Anniversary of the commissioning of the U.S.S. SLATER DE766.

Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day Invasion (Resolution No. 2333, Jean-Pierre)

On June 6, 1944, the Allied Forces in Europe combined for Operation Overlord, the extensive aerial and sea assault also known as the D-Day Invasion, at the beaches of Normandy, France. This military undertaking changed the direction of World War II and included two American Airborne divisions and two infantry divisions. This resolution commemorates the 80th anniversary of one of the largest successful amphibious military assaults in history.

Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Defenders Association's Veterans Defense Program (Resolution No. 2334, Jean-Pierre)

The New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA) founded the Veterans Defense Program (VDP) in 2014, the first program of its kind in the nation that has the goal of ensuring each veteran has an effective advocate in New York's criminal and family courts. The VDP promotes trauma-informed representation of veterans and service members by providing substantial legal assistance mitigation, and training to public defense attorneys representing veterans involved in the criminal and family court systems and offering treatment referrals and peer-to-peer mentoring to justice-involved veterans. This resolution commemorates the 10th anniversary of the Program.

Celebrating the Courage and Bravery of New York State's Korean War Veterans (Resolution No. 2335, Jean-Pierre)

During the Korean War approximately 1,789,000 members of the United States Armed Forces served in theater, including 482,000 New Yorkers, along with forces of the Republic of Korea and twenty other members of the United Nations to defend freedom and democracy. This resolution recognizes and celebrates New York's Korean War veterans.

Commemorating Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day (Resolution No. 2386, Raga)

In the words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, December 7, 1941, is "a date that will live in infamy." On this day, the Imperial Japanese Navy launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Over 3,500 American military personnel and civilians were killed or wounded. This resolution commemorates Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day on December 7, 2024.

Mourning the Deaths of Two New York Army National Guard Soldiers (Resolution No. 2205, Santabarbara and Resolution No. 2206, McDonald)

On March 8, 2024, while on a federal mission with the National Guard, Chief Warrant Officers 2 John M. Grassia III and Casey Frankoski were killed when their helicopter crashed near the southern border of Texas. The Assembly paused in its deliberations to honor these two heroes by adopting two resolutions recognizing their sacrifice.

Veteran-Related Events

Four Chaplains Day (Resolution No. 1073, Cunningham)

In World War II, four chaplains on board the sinking United States Army Transport Dorchester removed their own life jackets and gave them to others to save their lives. The chaplains were last seen arm-in-arm in prayer on the hull of the ship, demonstrating a unique ecumenical spirit and love for others. This resolution calls upon Governor Hochul to proclaim February 3, 2024, as Four Chaplains Day.

K9 Veterans Day (Resolution No. 950, Santabarbara)

Military dogs have served in many ways in wars, from World War I to present-day conflicts. The Army K9 Corps was created on March 13, 1942. Joseph J. White, a retired military dog handler, later led a nationwide effort to have March 13th recognized as K9 Veterans Day. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim March 13, 2024, as K9 Veterans Day.

Vietnam Veterans' Day (Resolution No. 1024, Jean-Pierre)

More than three million American service members fought in the Vietnam War from 1961 to 1975. In 2017, President Trump signed the Vietnam War Recognition Act, which encourages Americans to fly the American Flag on National Vietnam Veterans Day, March 29th. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim March 29, 2024, as Vietnam Veterans' Day.

Month of the Military Child (Resolution No. 2032 Hunter)

Established in 1986, the Month of the Military Child brings attention to the important role military children play in the armed forces community. The Month of the Military Child is a time to applaud military families and their children for the daily sacrifices they make and the challenges they overcome. These resolutions memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim April 2024 as the Month of the Military Child.

Yellow Ribbon Day (Resolution No. 1002, Walsh)

Yellow ribbons are symbols to show support for and solidarity with service members. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim April 9, 2024, as Yellow Ribbon Day.

Submarine Day (Resolution No. 1091, Walsh)

The American submarine community celebrates National Submarine Day on the anniversary of the United States government's acquisition of its first modern commissioned submarine, the USS Holland, on April 11, 1900. The submarine has played a vital part in wars and in the preservation of naval security and strategic readiness. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim April 11, 2024, as Submarine Day.

West Point Day (Resolution No. 1080, Eachus)

Over seventy years ago, the late James T. McNamara, a member of the New York State Assembly and the West Point class of 1939, authored the Legislature's first "West Point Day" Resolution. In the years since there have been subsequent resolutions commending the current students, staff, and alumni of the United States Military Academy. This resolution also celebrates the establishment of this historic institution and memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim April 9, 2024, as West Point Day.

Armed Forces Day (Resolution No. 2196, Lemondes)

President Harry S. Truman led the effort to establish a single holiday for citizens to thank military members for their service. On August 31, 1949, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson announced the creation of an Armed Forces Day to replace the separate Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force Days. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim May 18, 2024, as Armed Forces Day.

Women Veterans Recognition Day (Resolution No. 2322, Hunter)

On June 12, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 (P.L. 80-625). This law ensured that women would have a permanent place in the armed forces. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim June 12, 2024, as Women Veterans Recognition Day in recognition of the contributions and tremendous sacrifices women veterans have made.

Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month and Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day (Resolution No. 2346, Gunther)

While accounts of psychological symptoms following traumatic events stretch back to ancient times, it has been shown through electro-magnetic imagining that these traumas can cause physical changes to the brain. Referring to these invisible wounds as post-traumatic stress injury (PTSI) can favorably influence those affected and encourage them to seek treatment without fear of retribution or shame. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim June 2024 as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month and June 27, 2024, as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day.

Veterans Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day (Resolution No. 1037, Gunther)

This Day was established to recognize the life and death of Senior Airman Robert McRae Dean and every veteran and active duty military member who has died by suicide. It is also a day to elevate the issue in the public consciousness and to focus on prevention efforts. The rate of suicide among veterans was 1.4 times higher among male veterans and 1.8 time higher among female veterans when compared to the general adult population. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim September 22, 2024, as Veterans Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day in the State of New York.

November 2024 Veterans and Military Families Month (Resolution No. 2286, Rules Wallace)

In 1996, the Armed Services YMCA established November as National Veterans and Military Families Month. The State of New York recognizes the significant role military families and transitioning veterans have in supporting a stronger force. While its important to honor and recognize veterans during the month of November, it is also important to honor the families of these individuals so that we can acknowledge the everyday challenges they face and that they are not forgotten. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim November 2024 as Veterans and Military Families Month in the State of New York.

September 20, 2024 POW/MIA Day (Resolution No. 2355, Rules Jean-Pierre)

The first POW/MIA Recognition Day commemoration was held at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., while the 1st Tactical Squadron from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia flew the missing man formation. The reason for POW/MIA Recognition Day is to remember and stand behind those who served and to make sure everything is done to account for those who never returned. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim September 20, 2024, as POW/MIA Day in the State of New York.

October 26, 2024 Day of the Deployed (Resolution No. 2439, Rules Jean-Pierre)

Day of the Deployed is a day to honor our deployed troops and their families for their bravery and sacrifices they are making for our country. Members of the Armed Forces are called upon to be deployed on short notice to support, reassure, and defend allies and partners of the United States and to deter adversaries around the world. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim October 26, 2024, as the Day of the Deployed.

Veterans Awareness Week (Resolution No. 2308, Rules Jean-Pierre)

Veterans Day is a national holiday celebrated annually on November 11th, to pay homage to the veterans of our military. However, in honor of the true meaning of Veterans Day it is felt that an official week-long period is needed to show appreciation for veterans. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim November 3-9, 2024, the week prior to national Veterans Day, as Veterans Awareness Week.

VI. OTHER ACTIVITIES BY THE VETERANS' COMMITTEE

A. Hearings and Roundtables

On December 18th, the New York State Assembly Standing Committees on Veterans' Affairs and Local Governments will hold a hearing on the topic of veterans' benefits claims representation. The outcome of veterans' benefit claims has a significant impact on the well-being of veterans and their families. Advising and representing veterans in their benefit claims before the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is part of the core mission of the New York State Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) and local Veterans' Service Agencies (VSAs). However, they are not the only parties that offer assistance to veterans. A multitude of public and private institutions such as Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) provide similar services. In addition, there has also been an increasing number of individuals and companies, unaccredited by the VA, engaging in predatory and deceptive practices such as charging excessive and hidden fees for assisting with veterans' benefits claims. The purpose of this hearing is to examine the quality and effectiveness of veterans' claims representation, including representation provided by state and local veterans service agencies, and to determine what, if any, changes are needed to better protect veterans from unaccredited actors.

B. Subcommittee on Women Veterans

On May 30th, the Subcommittee on Women Veterans sponsored an event honoring women veterans in Albany. Several organizations attended, including Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, the Red Cross, and City Bar Justice Center Veterans Assistance Project. The keynote speaker was Lieutenant Colonel Alison Murray, Assistant Dean for Student Assistance, Syracuse University. The colonel had a 20-year career in the U.S. Army culminating in serving as the Assistant Deputy Commander for Nursing at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Army Medical Center. Activities included introduction of women veterans and passage of a legislative resolution memorializing Governor Hochul to proclaim June 12, 2024, as Women Veterans Recognition Day.

VII. OUTLOOK FOR 2025

The Committee is looking forward to a productive year in 2025 and will continue to work with DVS, the Division of Military and Naval Affairs, other State agencies, veterans' organizations, and individual veterans to develop legislation to assist the veterans of the State.

The issues that the Committee intends to pursue include:

- improving the operations of the DVS as a new department;
- supporting veterans' physical and mental health including outreach programs to help veterans in need of specific care related to mental health, PTSD, TBI, MST, and substance abuse;
- increasing outreach to recently discharged veterans and veterans of all ages in all areas of the State;
- enhancing veterans' employment opportunities;
- tailoring outreach to women and minority veterans to better identify and respond to their needs;
- continuing to monitor issues such as housing instability;
- expanding access to programs such as the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Counseling Program; and
- supporting Veterans Service Organizations.

The Committee will continue to strive to address the needs of New York's more than 650,000 veterans and their families.

APPENDIX A
2024 SUMMARY SHEET

Summary of Action on All Bills Referred to the Committee on

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Final Action	Assembly <u>Bills</u>	Senate <u>Bills</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Bills Reported With or Without Amendment</u>			
To Floor; Not Returning to Committee (Favorable)	3	0	3
To Ways & Means	6	0	6
To Codes	0	0	0
To Rules	0	0	0
To Judiciary	0	0	0
Total	9	0	9
<u>Bills Having Committee Reference Changed</u>			
To Ways and Means	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0
<u>Bills Defeated in Committee</u>	0	0	0
<u>Bills Held for Consideration With a Roll-Call Vote</u>	2	0	2
<u>Bills Never Reported or Held in Committee</u>	0	0	0
<u>Bills Having Enacting Clause Stricken</u>	1	0	1
<u>Motion to Discharge Lost</u>	0	0	0
TOTAL BILLS REMAINNING IN COMMITTEE	39		49
TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD		4	

**APPENDIX B
COMMITTEE CHAPTERS**

Assembly Bill #	Sponsor	Description	Chapter #
A4611-B	Jean-Pierre	Removes the requirement that veterans must have served during wartime for certain benefits.	445
A4613-C	Jean-Pierre	Requires the DVS Commissioner to provide a percentage increase in the maximum amount of funeral and burial services expenses upon formula for indigent veterans' burials.	450
A.8162-A	Cunningham	Requires DVS to create a maternity care program for pregnant and post-partum veterans.	623
A.8568	Jean-Pierre	Makes technical amendments to the definition of "veteran" and adds a definition of Gold Star Family Member.	103
A.8837-C	Cruz	Implements the Alex R. Jimenez NYS Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program.	625
A.9850	Jean-Pierre	Makes technical amendments to the Veterans' Services Law in relation to Chapter 602 of the Laws of 2021.	449

APPENDIX C

COMMITTEE BILLS THAT PASSED THE ASSEMBLY ONLY

Assembly Bill	Sponsor	Description
A.6992-A	Dinkins	Would require the DVS Discharge Upgrade Assistance Program to help veterans change their discharge status.
A.8914-A	Jean-Pierre	Would expand the definition of “veteran” to include members of the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Public Health Service (USPHS).
A.10204	Rules (Barrett)	Would ensure that Space Force members are eligible for certain veterans’ benefits.

APPENDIX D

COMMITTEE BILLS THAT WERE VETOED BY THE GOVERNOR

Assembly Bill #	Sponsor	Description	Veto Memo #
A4201-B	Stern	DVS, in consultation with DOH, would be required to undertake a study regarding veterans' healthcare	25
A7701-A	Jean-Pierre	DVS would be required to establish and maintain a database of resources available to veterans and their families.	37