

2023 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Human Services

Thank you, Senate, and Assemblymembers for allowing me to sit here and represent our military community. I sit here on behalf of the Ulster County Dwyer Program which is under the Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran Reintegration. And have the great privilege of sitting here as the facilitator for the NY State Dwyer Coalition also known as the Joseph P Dwyer Peer Support Project which is officially a state program.

2022, was a tremendous year for the PFC Joseph Dwyer Program because it was expanded to every county in NY States. This will allow every Veteran and their family to be connected to Veteran Peers. The Dwyer Program has allowed service members to feel equally represented because time, duty, and length of service do not matter when you put on the uniform. If you're homeless, let's help pay for a day or two for a hotel. If you enjoy the outdoors, well let us go take a hike or camp out. Equine Encounters, Mindfulness, and groups help continue the camaraderie that we experience in service. That is what the Dwyer Counties represent and that is what was brought to every county in NY State.

Now for every Dwyer County to be represented, we knew a united front and a collective body were needed. In December 2020, the NY State Dwyer Coalition under the Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran Reintegration was created. We have been meeting once a month to discuss the challenges that we have seen in our communities. Guest speakers as well as representatives from our NY State Assembly and Senate sit at the table and hear our voices. Our open and well-represented meetings give our community a large voice.

With the support and leadership of OMH, DVS, and the Governor's Office, the Dwyer Coalition uses its voice to help with the collaboration to assist new counties to develop their programs. The collaboration amongst these departments reflects the unity that was created within the Dwyer Coalition.

Our importance for being at any table means that we are being represented collectively as one voice when issues may bother us or challenges might affect us. For each of the counties that house a Dwyer Program, representation is very important because every Dwyer Program in their respective county is supposed to service their community uniquely and with 100% autonomy. Those two caveats have allowed every program to help an armed forces member that received a dishonorable or honorable discharge.

Collectively, many Dwyer Programs have shared the concern of the program never receiving an increase in funding since its enactment in 2012. The Dwyer Program has evolved into Peers transporting Veterans, assisting with food insecurities, advocating for housing, and many more. With inflation and the cost of living increasing, many programs have been able to offset the additional cost with fundraising and community generosity which sometimes doesn't cover the cost of many services. Thank you for your time.

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