



New York State Council of Veterans' Organizations

The Council has identified 2023 budget priorities as follows:

FUNDING FOR THE PFC JOSEPH DWYER PEER TO PEER PROGRAM
SUPPORT FOR DVS/COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS
VETERAN TREATMENT COURT FUNDING FOR MONITORS
VETERANS DEFENSE PROGRAM FUNDING AT INCREASED LEVELS

1) The Joseph Dwyer program is many things to many Veterans in many locations within the state. At this moment the Dwyer program is managed at many levels. OMH disperses the funding which goes to OMH and DVA agencies in ALL counties including New York City.

- WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE CONTINUED FUNDING OF COUNTIES AT CURRENT BUDGET LEVELS AND INCREASES BASED ON INPUT FROM WE ARE DWYER PARTICIPANTS THROUGHOUT THE STATE

How the money is allocated and what organizations deliver the services should be vetted in accordance with a plan authored by the statewide We are Dwyer Coalition, OMH and the Division of Veteran Services. Dwyer is important because it is fostered at the Post level, and creates a pipeline for mentors that works up the chain to Veteran Treatment Courts and the Veterans Defense Program.

2) County veteran service officers serve as the traffic cop for the returning veterans so that they are connected with the benefits they so richly deserve. They are solely responsible for connecting veterans to billions of dollars a year of federal dollars that they have earned through their service.. That tax free money turns over at least two times and is a tremendous boost to New York's local communities. Typical claims can be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

- WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE LEGISLATURE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT INCREASED FUNDS TO COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS

The Veteran Service Officer is not only a prolific claims expert but they are also leaders in their community and as the first stop for the returning veteran are able to counsel the veteran and get them connected with the local services that exist in every county but can be overlooked.

3) The military to civilian transition pathway initiative is critical to identifying veterans as they are discharged. Many are not focused on benefits or services when discharged. Upon returning “home” they sometimes are reluctant to be identified as veterans and flounder without knowledgeable mentors to assist. **Filling this gap is certainly an ongoing and successful function of the Dwyer program’s peer to peer mentoring** but should be partnered with federal resources to be more effective.

- WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE FUNDING ROUTED AND TARGETED AT VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL SUCH AS THE WE ARE DWYER COALITION, VFW , NYS SERVICE OFFICER ASSOCIATION,, NY DEFENDERS ASSOCIATION AND OTHER INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF NYS COUNCIL OF VETERAN ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE ABLE TO RECRUIT LOCAL VETERAN MENTORS READY AND ABLE TO ASSIST DURING THIS DIFFICULT TRANSITION PERIOD.

4) The Veteran Defense Program and Veterans Treatment Court go hand and hand in redeeming a veteran who brushes with the law. Typically, VTC will create an alternative sentencing path for the Veteran when charged at the misdemeanor level while VDP mounts a defense for the veteran charged with more serious crimes. Both programs are highly successful. VTC operates in a similar fashion to Drug Court in most localities but through diligent mentoring provides the oversight necessary for a successful alternative to incarceration.

- WE URGE FUNDING FOR VETERAN TREATMENT COURTS SO THAT ALL WILLING COUNTIES ARE ABLE TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN COURT.
- WE ALSO URGE THE LEGISLATURE TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE VETERANS DEFENSE PROGRAM. THE VDP IS NOT ONLY A HIGHLY RECOGNIZED AS A LAST STOP FOR VETERANS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE BUT SERVES AS AN EDUCATOR AND INTERPRETER BRINGING THE SERVICE JARGON AND UNIQUE PLIGHT OF THE VETERAN TO THE COURT TO PROPERLY EVALUATE ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING
- FINALLY WE URGE THE LEGISLATURE TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE VFW’S VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER PROGRAM IN BUFFALO AND DOWNSTATE FROM \$125,000 TO \$200,000.