



MAIL CALL

CHAIRMAN STEVE STERN

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Issue 009

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A Message From Our Chairman

It has been my privilege to work closely with and for the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much to protect our great nation. I look forward to meeting with our veterans from across New York State, and as Chairman I remain committed to ensuring that our veterans in New York State always receive the recognition, support, and services that they deserve.



Contact Chairman Stern

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Chairman Stern joining with the Jewish War Veterans Post 336 and the Village Chabad in Stony Brook to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah, and to remember and honor the service and sacrifice of our local heroes

Important Information from Chairman Stern

NYS Department of Veterans' Services	518-474-6114
Veterans Crisis Hotline	988, Press 1
VA Health Benefits Hotline	877-222-VETS
PACT Act Assistance	800-698-2411
VA Healthcare-Related Fraud, VHA Office of Integrity and Compliance Helpline	1-866-842-4357
VA Benefits Fraud Helpline	1-800-827-1000
Support for VGLI Program, SGLI Program, and FSGLI Claims	800-419-1473
Support for VA-Life, S-DVI, and VMLI	800-669-8477
Assistance with Education Benefits	888-442-4551
Caregiver Support Line	1-855-260-3274
VA Loan Guaranty Service	877-827-3702
Special Issue Hotline – Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, Gulf War, Agent Orange, and other information	800-749-8387
National Call Center for Homeless Veterans	877-424-3838
MISSION Act	800-698-2411
Spina Bifida Health Care Benefits Program	833-930-0816
Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, CHAMPVA	800-733-8387
Women Veterans Helpline	855-829-6636
Debt Management Center	800-827-0648
National Pension Call Center	877-294-6380
Health Resource Center (collection of medical and prescription debts)	866-400-1238
Paralyzed Veterans of America	212-807-3114
Veteran Text Crisis Line:	text 838255
Connect with a fellow combat Veteran about your experiences, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:	1-877-927-8387; TTY:711

Important Information from Chairman Stern

VA Health Chat: This app allows veterans to chat with VA staff when they have a question about a non-life-threatening health issue, want to schedule a VA appointment or refill a VA prescription, and more: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-chat>

VA Health and Benefits: Download the VA Health and Benefits mobile app to manage VA health care, benefits and payments from a mobile phone or tablet: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-and-benefits>

VA Video Connect: An app to help Veterans and their caregivers quickly and easily meet with VA health care providers through live video on any computer or mobile device with an internet connection: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect>

Schedule an online consultation with a NYS Veterans Services Agency Benefits Advisor: <https://veterans.ny.gov>

Find your local NYS Veterans Services Office: <https://veterans.ny.gov/office-locations>

Find your local NYS Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists:
<https://dol.ny.gov/services-veterans>

Property Tax Exemptions for Veterans:
<https://veterans.ny.gov/property-tax-exemptions-veterans>

Health and Disability Benefits for Families and Caregivers:
<https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/health-and-disability/>

Apply for a Veterans Status Designation on a NYS Photo ID:
<https://dmv.ny.gov/more-info/veteran-status-designation-on-a-photo-document>

Homes for Veterans Program: <https://veterans.ny.gov/homes-veterans-program>

Gold Star Annuity Program: <https://veterans.ny.gov/gold-star-parent-annuity-program>

New York State Blind Annuity Program: <https://veterans.ny.gov/new-york-state-blind-annuity-program>

Benefits for Certain Children of Vietnam War Veterans who served in areas where Agent Orange and other chemicals were used: <https://veterans.ny.gov/benefits-certain-children-vietnam-war-veterans>

New York State Veterans' Nursing Homes: <https://veterans.ny.gov/new-york-state-veterans-nursing-homes>

Find Your Local Vet Center: <https://www.va.gov/find-locations/>

Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Project

Founded in memory of Private First Class Joseph P. Dwyer, a combat medic in Iraq who struggled with PTSD, their mission is to advocate for safe, non-clinical environments where veterans can connect, share their experiences, and find healing through the support of their peers. This peer-driven approach helps veterans and their families navigate the challenges of civilian life, from mental health struggles to reintegration into their communities.



New York State's Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Programs

Connection. Community. Support.

**Explore Support Programs for
Veterans, Families & Caregivers**

Visit: www.JosephPDwyerPeerProject.org

This is the official website for all Dwyer Programs in New York State.

✧ What You'll Find on the Site:

- ✓ An interactive map of every Dwyer Program by county
- ✓ Upcoming events, meetups, and Veteran activities
- ✓ Peer support info for Veterans, families, and caregivers
- ✓ Resources for mental health, benefits, and reintegration
- ✓ Contact details to reach local program coordinators

👤 Who Is It For?

- ✓ Veterans from all service branches
- ✓ Active Duty, National Guard & Reservists
- ✓ Family members and caregivers



Website *powered by*



Scan the QR code or visit:
www.JosephPDwyerPeerProject.org

Assemblyman Stern's GUARD VA Benefits Act Signed into Law

***Legislation Protects Our Heroes from Veteran Pension Poaching,
Benefit Theft and Fraud***

New York State veterans will now have new protections against scammers engaging in predatory and deceptive practices after Governor Kathy Hochul recently signed into law legislation sponsored by New York State Assemblyman Steve Stern and Senator Siela Bynoe.

The Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act establishes new safeguards to prevent pension poaching, benefit theft and fraud by unaccredited representatives. Under this law, anyone who attempts to defraud veterans in New York State can be charged with a new class A misdemeanor for unaccredited representation and face up to \$10,000 in civil penalties per violation. The law also creates a veterans' services fund supported by collected civil penalties to provide grants to certified veteran service organizations that help veterans prepare and present benefits claims.

"As the Chairman of the New York State Assembly Veterans' Affairs Committee, I thank Governor Hochul for coming to Huntington to sign my bill to protect veterans from financial exploitation," said Assemblyman Steve Stern. "The GUARD VA Benefits Act will ensure that the brave men and women who sacrificed so much to protect our great nation are not taken advantage of by criminally minded posers charging outrageous fees to process veteran benefit claims."



Federal law has long prohibited any person from acting in the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of a claim for benefits administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) without being accredited by the VA. Accreditation ensures that an individual is qualified and competent to represent claimants and that such individuals are subject to VA oversight, including strict rules regarding when and how representatives may charge veterans a fee for their services. However, in 2006, Congress repealed the federal criminal penalties associated with violating those rules and since then unaccredited and often unscrupulous actors seeking to profit from veterans in need of assistance with filing and appealing their VA benefit claims have proliferated.

In addition to imposing new civil and criminal penalties against individuals engaging in fraud, the new law also seeks to help veterans and their families become better informed about their options to seek representation in a benefits matter, including the New York State Department of Veterans' Services (NYS DVS), county veterans' service officers and veterans' service organizations, all of whom provide VA claims representation to veterans and their dependents free of charge. Specifically, the law requires NYS DVS to establish an informational outreach program to veterans that raises awareness about available resources.

"Defrauding our veterans is illegal, immoral, and could not possibly be more wrong," said Assemblyman Stern. "With the passage of this bill, New York State fights back and sends a clear message that if you exploit our heroes, you will be held accountable. It is an important initiative to ensure that every veteran in New York State receives the care, support, and benefits they have earned."



NYS Department of Veterans' Services ***Healing Haven for Military Spouses***

The Department of Veterans' Services has launched its initiative "Healing Haven for Military Spouses," creating a safe, peer-to-peer, supportive environment for the spouses of Service Members and Veterans to come together, share openly, and take part in guided sessions focused on stress relief, positive mental health, and meaningful self-care.

Participation is entirely free, and the group will meet virtually on Zoom the 1st and 3rd Monday of every month.

To register, please visit the below link:

https://us06web.zoom.us/join/2F2lsRRhSKKGR_Ewofkz7RQ#/registration

7PM ZOOM MEETING SCHEDULE

1st Mon every Month

**Stress Relief for
Military Spouses**

3rd Mon every Month

**Self-Care Tools for
Military Families**

QUARTERLY IN-PERSON RETREATS

Schedule coming soon.



STRESS IS GONE



**Department of
Veterans' Services**

At United Veterans Beacon House we are committed to providing personalized, supportive care for our veteran clients.

United Veterans Beacon House is a 501(c)(3) non-profit headquartered in Bay Shore, New York. Each year our dedicated staff helps more than 1,250 veterans, through our housing program and community-based supportive programs.

Programs and Services:

- Emergency & transitional housing assists single males & single females.
- Permanent housing serves single males and veterans with families.
- Permanent housing for persons living with HIV/AIDS through the HOPWA program.
- Assistance with service & non-service connected benefits
- Nutritional assistance
- Pro bono legal services
- Transportation
- Job readiness & search
- Rental & utility arrears assistance
- Thrift shop
- Holiday meals & gift assistance
- Referrals to health care services

To learn if you're eligible, please call UVBH HQ at **631.665.1571** or scan this QR code.



CONTACT US:

631.665.1571 ● info@uvbh.com ● www.uvbh.org
1715 Union Blvd., Bay Shore, NY 11706

Veterans Peer Support Project

**Third Monday of Each Month
12 PM–2 PM**

Half Hollow Hills Community Library

55 Vanderbilt Parkway, Dix Hills, NY 11746

hhhlibrary.org | 631-421-4530

Stop by and speak with a peer mentor to learn about free programs and services for Long Island Veterans of all eras. Light refreshments will be available. No registration required. Open to all.



Joseph P. Dwyer Project

LEGAL SERVICES

**Legal Services
of Long Island**

Long Island
State Veterans Home
AT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

**Long Island State
Veterans Home**



**Suffolk County Veterans
Services Agency**



**Long Island Cares
Inc. The Harry
Chapin Food Bank**



**United Veterans
Beacon House**



Veterans' Affairs Committee Updates

Bills Signed into law as of 12/18/2025

A8476, STERN

This bill enacts the Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA benefits act to increase penalties on individuals and entities who act in violation of federal and state law related to preparing, presenting or prosecuting claims for veterans benefits including soliciting or receiving compensation in connection with a claim for VA benefits without being properly accredited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

SIGNED INTO LAW 11/5/25

A6264, STERN

Expands the definition of a veteran to include members of the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service

SIGNED INTO LAW 12/5/2025

A29, McDONALD

Designates New York State a Purple Heart state, honoring our combat veterans for their service and sacrifice.

SIGNED INTO LAW 11/5/25

A4751A, RAJKUMAR

Ensures that New York State and local veterans' service agencies include disabled veterans in employment assistance obligations.

SIGNED INTO LAW 11/5/25



A8475, BERGER

Makes technical corrections to the title of the Commissioner of Veteran's Services

SIGNED INTO LAW 11/21/25

A291, BARRETT

Extends State benefits to service members and veterans of the Space Force

SIGNED INTO LAW 12/5/2025

A2058, CUNNINGHAM

Requires the Women Veterans Coordinator of the Department of Veterans' Services to develop and implement a maternity care program for pregnant and postpartum veterans.

SIGNED INTO LAW 2/14/2025

A2435, CRUZ

Regarding the definition of "intended recipients" of the Alex R. Jimenez New York Military Immigrant Family Program to specifically include spouses, parents, and children of a uniformed service member, veteran, or reserve component member as well as the next-of-kin of such service members and veterans requesting a grant of posthumous U.S. citizenship on their behalf.

SIGNED INTO LAW 2/14/2025

Bills Delivered to the Governor as of 12/18/2025

A6579, STERN

Tax relief for the men and women who serve our nation - this legislation provides a property tax exemption for active service members whose military duty station is within the boundaries of New York State and has served in a combat zone anytime during the taxable year.

PASSED NYS SENATE 5/27/2025; PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/29/2025

A8485, STERN

Requires the Department of Veterans' Services to provide information on the department's website on volunteer opportunities available to veterans and to post relevant application forms that a qualified veteran can use to apply for volunteer opportunities.

PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 6/9/2025, PASSED NYS SENATE 6/12/2025



Bills in the NYS Assembly Veterans' Affairs Committee

A6538, SCHIAVONI

This bill provides that the previous Division of Veterans' Services will now be known as the Department of Veterans' Services, a Cabinet-level NYS agency, consistently throughout state law.

PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 4/8/2025

A8087, STERN

This bill authorizes the presentation of a New York State Cold War Commemorative Medal for active duty during the period of September 2, 1945 through December 26, 1991

PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/5/2025

A8089, DAIS

Establishes a New York State veterans' and service member law book of a compilation of all state statutes governing the rights, privileges, benefits and services afforded to veterans, service members and their families.

PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/5/2025

A3397A, RAGA

This bill would facilitate additional entries on the New York State Veterans Memorial Registry.

A6037A, HUNTER

This bill would establish a peer support program for veterans, and establishes minimum qualifications for recognized or certified veteran peer counselors.

A6559B, BENEDETTO

Establishes a veterans' bill of rights; provides sample language for such bill of rights; requires the Department of Veterans' Services to establish and distribute a veterans' bill of rights and to make such bill of rights available on the department's website.

PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/21/2025

A7627A, KAY

Authorizes the Department of Veterans' Services to consult and collaborate with relevant offices in the federal Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Health, the State Office for the Aging and other HCBS experts to develop educational materials for veterans and their families about the accessibility to home and community-based services.

PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/21/2025



A8425, STERN

This bill directs the Department of Veterans' Services to conduct a study about veterans' employment to help those who volunteer to serve in the military make a successful transition to civilian life and employment.

A8473, STERN

Enacts the "missing vulnerable veterans at risk program act" to establish a missing vulnerable veterans at risk program to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the problem of missing vulnerable veterans at risk.

A8477, HUNTER

Establishes a women veteran's peer to peer program.

A8483, O'PHARROW

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that any outside entities attempting to file a pension claim for veterans, or their family members, not receive any compensation prior to the claimant being provided notice of the agency of original jurisdiction.

A8484, STERN

Directs the commissioner of veterans' services to establish a registry of self-identifying service members, veterans and family members of such individuals who may have experienced exposure to a hazardous substance at a military installation and to establish and maintain a public information program in order to educate and inform service members, veterans, and their families.

Bills Vetoed by the Governor as of 12/18/2025

A4649A, RAJKUMAR

Provides that certificates of honorable separation from or service in the armed forces of the United States will be forwarded to the appropriate local veterans' service agency within 60 days of receipt.

VETOED BY GOVERNOR 12/12/25

A5155, STERN

This bill would create a veteran health care review to ensure veterans and their families have access to health and mental health treatment, including for post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, military sexual trauma, reproductive and mental health conditions, and suicide prevention.

VETOED BY GOVERNOR 12/5/25



To view our digital newsletter, with all embedded links, please scan the QR code below:

