

NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

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



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

COMMITTEE ON
Veterans' Affairs



KIMBERLY JEAN-PIERRE
Assemblywoman 11th District
Suffolk County

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Committee on Veterans Affairs
Legislative Women's Caucus

COMMITTEES
Banks
Children and Families
Corporations, Authorities
and Commissions
Education

MEMBER
Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and
Asian Legislative Caucus
Task Force on Women's Issues

December 15, 2023

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 2023 Annual Report of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Several significant pieces of legislation became law this year, most prominently legislation to increase free access to State parks, campsites, and other public places of recreation for veterans and Gold Star Families (Chapter 616), and the creation of two new commemorative medals to honor veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Chapters 609 and 610). The Committee also held a public hearing with the Standing Committee on Social Services to address the needs of New York's homeless veterans and examine the effectiveness of policies, services, and State funding related to helping homeless veterans.

While I am proud of the work we completed in 2023, 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 issues related to veterans.

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

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2023 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, and State veterans' nursing homes.

This past legislative session, the Committee held four Committee meetings at which it considered eighteen bills. Nine bills passed both houses of the Legislature and six were signed into law by the Governor.

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. 2023 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:

Veterans Memorial Registry (A.618 Barrett; Chapter 14 of the Laws of 2023)

This technical amendment clarified how information will be submitted to the Department of Veterans’ Services (DVS) for inclusion in the searchable registry of the military and veterans’ memorials established pursuant to Chapter 588 of the Laws of 2022.

B. Deceased Veterans

Burial of Indigent Veterans (A.3116-A Hunter; Chapter 620 of the Laws of 2023)

This law requires counties and the City of New York to contact a congressionally chartered veterans’ service organization and request the organization to provide funeral services for deceased indigent veterans. The law also requires DVS to develop an application process for the veterans’ service organizations to receive reimbursement for costs associated with such services.

C. Medals

New York State has a history of recognizing the proud and courageous actions of veterans who served with honor and distinction with military medals and citations for their service. This year the Legislature created two new commemorative medals.

New York State Iraq War Commemorative Medal (A.119-A Magnarelli; Chapter 609 of the Laws of 2023)

This law authorizes the Governor to present, in the name of the Legislature, the New York State Iraq War Commemorative Medal to members of the armed forces who served in Iraq during the period of March 20, 2003, to December 31, 2021.

New York State Afghanistan War Commemorative Medal (A.121-A Magnarelli; Chapter 610 of the Laws of 2023)

This law authorizes the Governor to present, in the name of the Legislature, the New York State Afghanistan War Commemorative Medal to members of the armed forces who deployed to Afghanistan during the period of October 7, 2001, to August 30, 2021.

D. Department of Veterans’ Services

Alex R. Jimenez New York State Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program (A.3403-A Cruz; Veto Memo 44)

This legislation would require DVS, in conjunction with the Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) and the Office for New Americans, to implement a program to assist non-citizen active-duty uniformed service members, veterans, reserve component members and their family members, to secure United States citizenship and legal immigration status.

Searchable Database of Veteran-Owned Businesses (A.4104-A Hunter; Veto Memo 99)

This legislation would direct DVS to establish a public directory of veteran-owned businesses, identifying which are certified service-disabled veteran-owned businesses, listed by type of business and geographic location within the State. The Office of General Services (OGS) would also be required to use information from the directory to create a searchable database to promote veteran-owned businesses to the public. In addition, DVS and OGS would conduct outreach to veteran-owned business and notify them of the registration process for inclusion in the directory and database.

Veterans Employment Task Force (A.7350 Stern; Chapter 519 of the Laws of 2023)

Chapter 607 of the Laws of 2021 and Chapter 81 of the Laws of 2022 created a task force to study and improve veteran employment opportunities. These chapters amended Article 17 of the Executive Law, which was repealed on April 1, 2023, and replaced with the Veterans' Services Law. This law places the Task Force's enabling legislation within the Veterans' Services Law, so that it may continue its work.

E. Miscellaneous

Free Use of State Parks for Veterans and Gold Star Families (A. 6084-A Jean-Pierre; Chapter 616 of the Laws of 2023)

This law allows any veteran, including veterans of the state's organized militia, or Gold Star Family member to use any public campsite, park and other public places of recreation in the State free of charge.

Military Monuments (A.2793-A, Otis; Veto Memo 83)

This legislation would require an act of the Legislature to authorize a change in the status of a municipal military monument or memorial.

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 \$32.9 million, an increase of \$2.87 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. The State Budget for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$16,532,000, which is a \$1,776,000 increase from the prior fiscal year. This 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 for the Department's federal education benefits, including approval of on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$2,154,000 for this program.

Administration Programs

DVS's Administration Programs include:

- *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 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$400,000 for these benefits.
- *Gold Star Parents*
Gold Star Parents have lost children in the armed services during a time of war. This appropriation supports the payment of annuities to each Gold Star Parent. In 2022, the annuity amount was \$548.04. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$599,000 for these annuities.
- *State Veterans' Cemetery Operations*
The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included \$900,000 for the services and expenses associated with the operation of the State veterans' cemetery located in Romulus, New York from the Veterans Remembrance and Cemetery Maintenance and Operations Fund. An additional \$900,000 for cemetery operations was provided by the Federal Veterans' Cemetery Account. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 also included a \$4,000,000 appropriation for the design, construction, and operation of the State veterans' cemetery.

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 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$6,380,000.

Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund

The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included \$1.1 million to provide funding for emergency and temporary housing, as well as assistance for home repair and renovations for veterans.

Veterans Memorial Registry

The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included \$500,000 to implement Chapter 588 of the Laws of 2022, and Chapter 14 of the Laws of 2023, which established a searchable database of all veteran memorials in the state.

Mobile Veterans' Service Centers

The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included \$300,000 to establish a fleet of mobile service centers that will allow accredited Veterans Benefits Advisors to serve veterans, service members, and military families at their home or place of work, especially in rural areas of the State.

Capital Projects

The Veterans' Nonprofit Capital Program (VNCP)

The Legislature allocated \$5,000,000 to be used for grants to fund capital improvements to facilities owned or controlled by veteran nonprofit organizations; provided that in cases involving the acquisition of non-fixed equipment and capital assets such assets will only be used by the grant recipients. The grants will be administered by the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) and awarded on a competitive basis through an application process established by DASNY and DVS.

County and City Veterans' Service Agencies

County and city veterans' service agencies (VSAs) are mandated by State law to assist members of the 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 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$2,380,000 for county and city 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 of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts into the community, short-term psychological counseling for veterans and their immediate families, residential programs for homeless veterans, and an alternative to incarceration program through the Monroe County Veterans' Treatment Court. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$250,000 for the services and expenses related to the Veterans' Outreach Center, Inc.

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 process of upgrading their discharge if it is necessary for them to access federal VA benefits. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$200,000 for services and expenses for the SAGE Veterans Project. 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 goal of the Project is to provide free legal advice and direct representation to veterans in civil legal matters. The Project covers more than 120,000 veterans living in Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, and Westchester counties. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation 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 assisting defense attorneys in providing justice to veterans with mental health issues arising out of their military service and facilitating treatment to begin healing the wounds of war. 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 2023-24 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 is a charitable corporation that 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 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$300,000 to facilitate further the Program's statewide expansion. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Indigent Burial Services

Chapters 579 of the Laws of 2015, and Chapter 29 of the Laws of 2016, were enacted to provide dignified burials to indigent veterans. Congressionally chartered veterans' organizations are requested by the City of New York and counties to provide these services. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included a sub-allocation of \$100,000 to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance for the payment of burial services for indigent veterans.

Veteran-to-Veteran Support Services

The concept of Veteran Treatment Courts started in Buffalo, New York. Currently, there are 34 of these courts statewide to address the needs of veterans who find themselves 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 services and support, as well as local, state, and federal agencies specializing in veterans' services. A key component of these courts are the veterans who serve as volunteer mentors to the defendants. These individuals provide support and motivation to the veterans who are currently in the court system and help them not only navigate the criminal justice system but also reintegrate into civilian society.

The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$1,000,000 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 the 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. Areas in which the clinics provide assistance include foreclosure prevention and other consumer protection matters, family law, discharge upgrades, and complex appeals regarding VA benefits. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 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. In order to be a member of the VFW, a person must be a U.S. citizen or U.S. national, have served in the Armed Forces of the United States, received an honorable or general discharge, and served in war, campaign, or expedition on foreign soil or in hostile waters. A veteran service officer of the VFW helps veterans navigate the various benefits available on the federal, state, and local level. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 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.

North Country Veterans' Association

Located in Plattsburgh, New York, the nonprofit veteran-run North Country Veterans' Association works to assist veterans and their families with employment, education, finances, health, and wellness. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$125,000 for the services and expenses of the Association. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Clear Path for Veterans

Clear Path for Veterans' mission is to empower service members, veterans, and their families through supportive programs and services in a safe, respectful environment to help service members transition to civilian life through wellness-enhancing programming. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 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 2023-24 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 the SFY 2023-24 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 access to State lands and 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 2023-24 included \$150,000 in funding 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 2023-24 included \$100,000 for improvements to the naval park. 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 2023-34 included \$100,000. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

Hunts Point WWI Veteran Monument

The Hunts Point World War I Veterans Monument in the Bronx is dedicated to World War I veterans from Hunts Point. The monument is a thick octagonal column five feet high and stands at the intersection of Southern Boulevard and Hunts Point Avenue, opposite De Valle Square, formerly known as Crammes Square for local resident Charles Crammes who was killed in World War I. The State Budget for the SFY 2023-24 included \$15,000 for necessary repairs. 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 2023-24 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.

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, and has since been expanded to fund 23 additional counties: Broome, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Columbia, Dutchess, Erie, Genesee, Monroe, Nassau, Niagara, Onondaga, Orange, Orleans, Putnam, Rockland, Saratoga, Suffolk, Sullivan, Ulster, Warren, Washington, Westchester, and Wyoming. The State Budget for SFY 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$7.7 million to expand the program to fund all counties, and the City of New York. The appropriation also continued funding to the University at Albany School of Social Welfare.

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 2023-24 included \$1,000,000 for services and expenses of suicide prevention efforts for veterans, first responders, law enforcement, and corrections officers.

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 2023-24 included an appropriation of \$26,000 for this program. This is a legislative addition to the proposed Executive Budget.

IV. VETERAN-RELATED LAWS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Banks Committee

Loan Counseling Services (A.633 Stern; Chapter 102 of the Laws of 2023)

This law provides that mortgage lending institutions and mortgage bankers must disclose to veterans seeking a housing loan under Chapter 37 of Title 38 of the United States Code, that loan counseling services are offered through DVS by a counselor certified by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development under Part 214 of Title 24 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The Department of Veterans' Services may promulgate regulations to prevent potential conflicts of interest between counselors and mortgage companies.

Governmental Employees Committee

Expansion of Disabled Veterans State Government Opportunities (A.6480 Burdick; Chapter 521 of the Laws of 2023)

This law creates more employment opportunities in state government for disabled persons, including disabled veterans, by allowing positions designated under sections 55-b and 55-c of the Civil Service Law to be filled on a full-time or part-time basis.

Removal of Civil Service "Wartime Service" Requirement (A.7379 Pheffer Amato; Chapter 618 of the Law of 2023)

This law eliminates the requirement that a disabled veteran have served during wartime to be eligible for one of five hundred noncompetitive class civil service disabled veteran positions.

Governmental Operations Committee

Veterans Internship Program (A.1347 Buttenschon; Chapter 619 of the Laws of 2023)

This law establishes a Veterans Internship Program (V.I.P. NY) within the Legislature, awarding ten percent of available internships in the New York State Assembly Youth Participation Program and the New York State Senate Student Program to honorably discharged veterans.

Housing Committee

Publication of the Number of Veterans on Certain Housing Waiting Lists (A.1084 Walker; Chapter 621 of the Laws of 2023)

This law requires the publication of the number of veterans or surviving spouses of veterans on the wait list for the Mitchell Lama housing applications.

Mental Health Committee

Establishment of PTSD Treatment Training Program (A.793 Hunter; Chapter 736 of the Laws of 2023)

This law requires the Office of Mental Health to develop a training program for mental health providers and clinicians, to be posted on the Office's website, for the diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including military culture competency, for military veterans.

Real Property Taxation Committee

Property Tax Exemption for Career Military Members (A.3381-A Woerner; Chapter 611 of the Laws of 2023)

This law provides that an individual who meets the other requirements of the Alternative Veterans Exemption and has been discharged or released from the active military service of the United States under honorable conditions after having served for a period of at least ten years may be considered a veteran and receive a property tax exemption.

Transportation Committee

"Sergeant Gary Beikirch Memorial Act" (A.3305-B Clark; Chapter 145 of the Laws of 2023)

This law allows spouses of Congressional Medal of Honor recipients to receive Congressional Medal of Honor license plates. This law aligns the eligibility criteria for these license plates with other distinctive license plates for military honors such as the Purple Heart.

V. LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS

Honoring Veterans

Recognizing March 10, 2023, as Harriet Tubman Day (Resolution No.153, 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.

Commemorating the 79th Anniversary of the D-Day Invasion (Resolution No.656, 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 79th anniversary of one of the largest successful amphibious military assaults in history.

Commemorating June 14, 2023, as Flag Day (Resolution No.685, 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 each year as Flag Day. This resolution commemorates June 14, 2023, as Flag Day.

Mourning the Death of William Thomas Mahan, United States Army Veteran and American Legion Consultant for Legislative Committee (Resolution No. 312, Zebrowski)

William Thomas Mahan, of New City, New York died on Sunday, January 8, 2023. Mahan entered the Army and served as a Staff Sergeant during the Korean War. After his discharge, Mahan was very active in veterans' affairs serving in a variety of positions including Commander of both American Legion Post 1682 and Rockland County, as well as the New York State American Legion Consultant for the Legislative Committee. In 2001, Mahan was appointed by the Governor to serve as President of the Board of Visitors for the New York State Veterans Home at Montrose, NY. This resolution honors Mr. Mahan for his years of service to the veteran community and The American Legion.

Commending the Veterans Outreach Center for its 50th Anniversary (Resolution No. 675, Bronson)

Founded in 1973 by returning Vietnam veterans, the Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) of Rochester remains an important asset for veterans and their families, offering a comprehensive portfolio of supportive services. This resolution commends the Veterans Outreach Center on its 50th Anniversary.

Celebrating the Courage and Bravery of New York State’s Korean War Veterans (Resolution No. 352, 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.

Commending Jewish War Veterans (Resolution No. 442, Lunsford)

Founded on March 15, 1896, by 63 Jewish War veterans of the American Civil War, the Jewish War Veterans (JWV) is the oldest veteran organization in this country. Since its inception, JWV has been a force against bigotry while working with the Jewish Community. Its members and auxiliary serve veterans through active programs on behalf of war wounded and patients at VA hospitals. There are several JWV posts statewide. This resolution commends the Jewish War Veterans of the United States and pays tribute to its members for their outstanding contributions.

Commemorating the 1st Annual Honor Flight Day (Resolution No. 294, 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. More than 5,000 New York veterans have taken Honor Flights. This resolution commemorates the 1st Annual Honor Flight Day.

Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Reserve Organization of America (Resolution No. 718, Angelino)

Since 1922, the Reserve Officers Association of the United States has championed the cause of the Reserve Components at home and in the time of war. ROA has been a prominent voice for the cause of preparedness and has effectively advocated on behalf of the Reserve and National Guard. This resolution commemorates the 100th Anniversary of the Reserve Organization of America.

Commemorating the Naming of the Borinqueneers (Resolution No. 610, Ramos)

After the end of World War I, the Army reduced the size to pre-war levels, which resulted with the Puerto Rican Regiment being re-designed the 65th. The Regular Army differed from the state volunteers and militias that made up of most of the units before World War I because it was full-time, professional force. The 65th Infantry Regiment was train alongside other U.S. Army units and other branches of the military until the United States entered World War II. This regiment was nicknamed the Borinqueneers for the original Taino Indian name for Puerto Rico (Borinquen),. The 65th Regiment was deactivated from the regular U.S. Army in 1959, when its units and regimental number were assigned to the Puerto Rico National Guard. In 1982, the U.S. Army Center for Military History officially designated the 65th Infantry Regiment as the “Borinqueneers.” This resolution commemorates the naming of the Borinqueneers and pays tribute to the 65th Infantry Regiment for their courage, bravery, service, and dedication.

Commemorating Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day (Resolution No. 651, 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, 2023.

Veteran-Related Events

Four Chaplains Day (Resolution No.63, Cunningham)

In World War II, four chaplains on board the sinking United States 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, 2023, as Four Chaplains Day.

Navy Reserve Day (Resolution No. 195, Chang)

Navy Reserve Day commemorates the establishment of the United States Navy Reserve. Legislation was passed by Congress to establish what is now the Navy Reserve on March 3, 1915, in anticipation of the United States’ entry into World War I. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim March 3, 2023, as Navy Reserve Day.

K9 Veterans Day (Resolution No.176, 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 working dog handler later led a nation-wide 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. 250, 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, 2023, as Vietnam Veterans’ Day.

Month of the Military Child (Resolution No. 370 Jean-Pierre)

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 2023 as the Month of the Military Child.

Yellow Ribbon Day (Resolution No. 257, Walsh)

Yellow ribbons are symbols to show support for and solidarity with service members. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim April 9, 2023, as Yellow Ribbon Day.

Submarine Day (Resolution No. 256, 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, 2023, as Submarine Day.

West Point Day (Resolution No. 360, 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 26, 2023, as West Point Day.

Military Appreciation Month (Resolution No.550, Jean-Pierre)

May is National Military Appreciation Month and includes VE Day, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, Loyalty Day, Armed Forces Day, Public Service Recognition Week, and Memorial Day. This month recognizes those on active duty in all branches of service, the National Guard and Reserves, military retirees, veterans, and all their families. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim May 2023, as Military Appreciation Month.

Military Spouse Appreciation Day (Resolution No.530, Jean-Pierre)

On April 17, 1984, President Ronald Reagan recognized the profound importance of spousal commitment to the readiness and well-being of military members with Proclamation 5184. Congress officially made Military Spouse Appreciation Day part of National Military Appreciation Month in 1999 to honor the contribution and sacrifices made by military spouses whose commitment and support help to keep our country safer. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim May 6, 2023, as Military Spouse Appreciation Day.

Military Animal Appreciation Week and to honor these animals for their service (Resolution No. 559, Manktelow)

Military animals play a vital role in assisting military service members. Over the years, these courageous military animals including dogs, dolphins, rats, horses, mules, donkeys, and pigeons; have supported service members in a wide variety of missions such as carrying messages and equipment and detecting bombs and mines This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim May 21-27, 2023, as military animal appreciation week.

Armed Forces Day (Resolution No. 500, 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 20, 2023, as Armed Forces Day.

Women Veterans Recognition Day (Resolution No. 558, 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, 2023, 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. 688, 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 2023 as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month and June 27, 2023, as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day.

Purple Heart Day (Resolution No. 662, Jean-Pierre)

The Purple Heart is the “oldest military decoration in the world in present use and the first award made available to a common soldier.” On August 7, 1782, during the Revolutionary War, General Washington issued an order establishing a badge of distinction for meritorious action. Today the Purple Heart is awarded to service members wounded or killed in action. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim August 7, 2023, as Purple Heart Day, in conjunction with the observance of National Purple Heart Day.

Pets for Veterans Day (Resolution No. 553, Manktelow)

National Pets for Veterans Day was created to recognize all the exceptional therapy animals who partner with their human companions to bring comfort and healing, and to help spread awareness about veterans’ emotional needs, including helping them transition back to post-service life. This resolution memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim October 21, 2023, as Pets for Veterans Day.

Veterans Awareness Week (Resolution No. 695, 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 October 29 - November 4, 2023, the week prior to national Veterans Day, as Veterans Awareness Week.

VI. OTHER ACTIVITIES BY THE VETERANS' COMMITTEE

A. Hearings and Roundtables

On December 19, 2023, the New York State Assembly Committees on Veterans' Affairs and Social Services and the Subcommittee on Women Veterans held a joint hearing on the topic of meeting the needs of homeless veterans. The hearing focused on reviewing the effectiveness of existing policies, the availability of services, and State funding at DVS and OTDA related to helping homeless veterans. The Committee members heard testimony from a variety of sources including James Hendon, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Veterans' Services, the Veteran Advocacy Project, Services for the Underserved, and Cornell University.

B. Subcommittee on Women Veterans

On May 30, 2023, 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 guest speaker was Christine Rem, founder of the Capital District Women Veterans, Inc. Activities included introductions of women veterans and passage of a legislative resolution memorializing Governor Hochul to proclaim June 12, 2023, as Women Veterans Recognition Day.

VII. OUTLOOK FOR 2024

The Committee is looking forward to a productive year in 2024 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
2023 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)	1	0	1
To Ways & Means	12	0	12
To Codes	0	0	0
To Rules	2	0	2
To Judiciary	0	0	0
Total	15	0	15
<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>	3	0	3
<u>Bills Never Reported or Held in Committee</u>	0	0	0
<u>Bills Having Enacting Clause Stricken</u>	0	0	0
<u>Motion to Discharge Lost</u>	0	0	0
TOTAL BILLS REMAINNING IN COMMITTEE	37	7	44
TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD		4	

**APPENDIX B
COMMITTEE CHAPTERS**

Assembly Bill #	Sponsor	Description	Chapter #
A119-A	Magnarelli	Creates an Iraq War Commemorative Medal	609
A121-A	Magnarelli	Creates an Afghanistan War Veteran Commemorative Medal	610
A618	Barrett	Clarifies submission requirements for in the veteran's memorial registry	14
A3116-A	Hunter	Requires counties and the City of New York to request a veterans' organization to provide funeral services for deceased indigent veterans	620
A6084-A	Jean-Pierre	Permits Gold Star families to use State public campsites, parks and other places of recreation to this state free of charge	616
A.7350	Stern	Re-establishes the task force on veteran's employment opportunities in the Department of Veterans' Services	519

APPENDIX C

COMMITTEE BILLS THAT PASSED THE ASSEMBLY ONLY

Assembly Bill	Sponsor	Description
A.4201-B	Stern	Requires the Department of Veterans' Services in consultation with the Department of Health to conduct a study on veterans' health care
A.4611-B	Jean-Pierre	Removes the requirement that a veteran served in wartime to be granted certain benefits
A.7173	Jean-Pierre	Relates to the designation of a veteran liaison in all state agencies