



# MAIL CALL

## CHAIRMAN STEVE STERN

### COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Issue 003

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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

95 Broad Hollow Road, Suite 100,  
Melville, NY 11747  
631-271-8025  
[sterns@nyassembly.gov](mailto:sterns@nyassembly.gov)

Legislative Office Bldg. Room 841  
Albany, NY 12248  
518-455-5732  
<https://nyassembly.gov/comm/?id=40>



*Assemblyman Steve Stern at the Half Hollow Hills Community Library Veterans Testimonial Project & Open House*

# Important Information from Chairman Stern

<b>Veterans Crisis Hotline</b> .....	988, Press 1
<b>NYS Veterans Benefits Advisor</b> .....	1-888-838-7697
<b>VA Health Benefits Hotline</b> .....	877-222-VETS
<b>PACT Act Assistance</b> .....	800-698-2411
<b>VA Healthcare-Related Fraud, VHA Office of Integrity and Compliance Helpline</b> .....	1-866-842-4357
<b>VA Benefits Fraud Helpline</b> .....	1-800-827-1000
<b>Support for VGLI Program, SGLI Program, and FSGLI Claims</b> .....	800-419-1473
<b>Support for VA-Life, S-DVI, and VMLI</b> .....	800-669-8477
<b>Assistance with Education Benefits</b> .....	888-442-4551
<b>Caregiver Support Line</b> .....	1-855-260-3274
<b>VA Loan Guaranty Service</b> .....	877-827-3702
<b>Special Issue Hotline - Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, Gulf War, Agent Orange, and other information</b> .....	800-749-8387
<b>National Call Center for Homeless Veterans</b> .....	877-424-3838
<b>MISSION Act</b> .....	800-698-2411
<b>Spina Bifida Health Care Benefits Program</b> .....	833-930-0816
<b>Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, CHAMPVA</b> .....	800-733-8387
<b>Women Veterans Helpline</b> .....	855-829-6636
<b>Debt Management Center</b> .....	800-827-0648
<b>National Pension Call Center</b> .....	877-294-6380
<b>Health Resource Center (collection of medical and prescription debts)</b> .....	866-400-1238

# Important Information from Chairman Stern

**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>

# 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.



[Connect with a Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Project near you](https://www.josephpdwyerpeerproject.org/dwyer-counties)  
<https://www.josephpdwyerpeerproject.org/dwyer-counties>



Every second Thursday of the month at 11:00AM, the Suffolk County Joseph P. Dwyer Project - Family Support and Education Series hosts a virtual presentation for veterans and families, featuring a new topic every session.

Join here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86829194414#success>

Meeting ID: 868 2919 4414

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**



*News from*

Assemblymember  
**Steve Stern**

Assembly District 10



## ***Assemblyman Steve Stern's Updates on the NYS 2026 Budget***

**Albany, NY** - Following the passage of the NYS 2026 FY budget, Assemblyman Steve Stern announces expanded benefits for our New York State veterans and their families. The Gold Star Annuity Program was extended to include immediate family members of Service Members who made the ultimate sacrifice in combat. The program was previously limited to the parents of fallen soldiers. The budget further aided our military families through including \$350,000 for the Military Family Relief Fund, supporting various relief initiatives to enhance the lives of our military families across New York State.

Ensuring that our veterans have the support and resources they need when they return home, \$1 million are allocated towards Veteran Suicide Prevention Initiatives, including enhanced risk assessment training, outreach tools, gun safety programs, and improved access to mental health services. Please see below for further information regarding items included in this year's budget to support our Veterans, their families, and Veterans organizations:

*Please visit the NYS FY 2026 Enacted Budget Page for more information:*

**<https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy26/en/index.html>**

# SUNY Campus Military-Connected Services

## Prospective Students:

*Susan Dewan, Assistant Director for  
Military and Veteran Recruitment*

518-445-4069

susan.dewan@suny.edu

## Current Students:

*Diana Pasterchick, SUNY Coordinator  
of Veteran and Military Affairs*

diana.pasterchick@suny.edu

## **Find Your Local Campus Military-Connected Services Office Here**

<https://www.suny.edu/attend/get-started/military-and-veteran-students/campus-veterans-services-offices/>

# NYS and Federal Education Benefits and Assistance

## Operation Recognition:

Veterans who left high school without graduating are eligible to earn New York State high school diplomas, recognizing the devotion and sacrifice of all Veterans who left school early.

Veterans and family members can obtain more information by calling the New York State Department of Education at 518-474-8940 and visiting <https://veterans.ny.gov/operation-recognition>

## Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance

If you are a child or spouse of a Veteran or service member who has died, is captured or missing, or is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability, you may be eligible for the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program

**For more information, and to apply, visit <https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/education-and-careers/dependents-education-assistance/>**

## The Fry Scholarship:

You may be eligible for Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship benefits if you are the child or surviving spouse of a service member or member of the Selected Reserve who died on or after September 11, 2001.

**For more information and to apply, visit: <https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/education-and-careers/fry-scholarship/>**



# Lifetime Liberty Pass

The Lifetime Liberty Pass allows New York State Veterans or Gold Star Parents, Spouses, and Children access to State parks, historic sites, and recreational parks at a discounted cost, including free vehicle entry to most state-operated parks and Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)-operated day-use areas, as well as a number of state-operated boat launch sites, historic sites, arboretums and park preserves, free greens fees at state-operated golf courses, swimming pool entrances at State Park pools, and discounted camping and cabin rentals at most State Park and DEC campgrounds. The pass holder must be present when utilizing the pass for its intended benefits.

For further information on benefits, restrictions, and rules, please see the [Lifetime Liberty Pass Guidelines for Use](https://parks.ny.gov/documents/admission/OPRHPLifetimeLibertyPassGuidelines.pdf), <https://parks.ny.gov/documents/admission/OPRHPLifetimeLibertyPassGuidelines.pdf>, as well as the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation website, <https://parks.ny.gov/admission/lifetime-liberty-pass.aspx>.

**A NY State Department of Motor Vehicles photo document (ID) with Veteran status designation can be used at all staffed facilities without a Lifetime Liberty Pass. Simply present your ID to NY State Parks staff.**

To apply for your NYS DMV photo ID with veteran status designation, visit: <https://dmv.ny.gov/more-info/veteran-status-designation-on-a-photo-document>



*If you intend to visit unstaffed locations, a No-Fee ticket can be obtained at the Park Office, or order a free Lifetime Liberty Pass to ensure seamless entry.*



## How to Apply for a Lifetime Liberty Pass as a Veteran:

If you do not have the Veteran status designation on your NYS DMV photo ID, place an order for a free Lifetime Liberty Pass to ensure seamless entry:

**Click here to order your Lifetime Liberty Pass:**

<https://shop.parks.ny.gov/store/liberty-pass/lifetime-liberty-pass>

After placing your order, follow the directions in your order summary email to submit one of the following indicating an honorable discharge:

- A copy of your NY State DMV ID with Veteran status designation
- DD-214
- DD-215
- NGB Form 22
- WD AGO 53, 55 or 53-55
- NAVPERS 553
- NAVMC 78PD
- NAVCG553
- NA Form 13038

## How to Apply for a Lifetime Liberty Pass as a Gold Star Parent, Spouse, or Child:

If you are a Gold Star Parent, Spouse, or Child, place an order for a free Lifetime Liberty Pass to ensure seamless entry at state-operated park locations.

**Click here to order your Lifetime Liberty Pass:**

<https://shop.parks.ny.gov/store/liberty-pass/lifetime-liberty-pass>

After placing your order, follow the directions in your order summary email to submit one of the following documents:

- DD-1300 (Report of Casualty)
- Copy of a U.S Department of Defense telegram notifying the parent of their loss.



The Lifetime Liberty Pass is not required to be accepted at the following concessionaire and partner-operated locations. If you plan to visit one of the locations below, please contact the facility directly to determine if the pass will be honored:

### **GOLF**

Beaver Island State Park Golf Course (Accepted weekdays, excluding holidays):

(716) 800-3954

Bonavista State Park Golf Course: (607) 869-9909

Indian Hills State Golf Course: (607) 523-8060

Springbrook Greens State Golf Course: (315) 947-4000

Saratoga Spa State Park Golf Course: (518) 584-2006

St. Lawrence State Park Golf Course: (315) 393-2286

Wellesley Island State Park Golf Course: (315) 215-4042

Sag Harbor State Golf Course: (631) 725-2503

### **MARINAS**

Buffalo Harbor State Park Marina: General information - (716) 822-1207; Marina phone - (716) 828-0027

Sampson State Park Marina: (315) 585-6392

Seneca Lake State Park Marina: (315) 789-2331

Coles Creek State Park Marina: (315) 388-5636



# NYS Patriot Plan



The Patriot Plan Benefit allows residents of New York State, who are members of the New York State National Guard, Militia, or Reserves to apply for one free Empire Pass during their active duty assignment, which may be shared with their family.

The Empire pass holder may present or scan their Empire Pass at participating NYS Park sites to waive the Vehicle Use Fee. For additional information on the Empire Pass, including where it is accepted, or Guidelines for Use, please visit the [Empire Pass website](https://parks.ny.gov/admission/empire-passport/default.aspx), <https://parks.ny.gov/admission/empire-passport/default.aspx>.

For more information on the NYS Patriot Plan, please visit: <https://parks.ny.gov/admission/patriot-plan-benefit/>, and for further assistance, you may also contact the Pass Programs office at 518-474-0458, Monday through Friday.

## To qualify for the Patriot Plan Benefit, the applicant must be:

- A New York State Resident
- A member of the New York State National Guard, Militia, or Reserves
- Currently serving on active duty in support of the war on terrorism (Title 10 or Title 32)

*\*Orders for Training or Temporary Change of Station are not accepted for the Patriot Plan Benefit.*

## How To Apply:

- Complete a [Patriot Plan Application](https://parks.ny.gov/documents/admission/FillablePatriotProgramApplication.pdf):  
<https://parks.ny.gov/documents/admission/FillablePatriotProgramApplication.pdf>
- Attach a copy of current orders with correct eligibility information
- Email the application and copy of the orders to: [empirepassport@parks.ny.gov](mailto:empirepassport@parks.ny.gov)

Or mail to:

Empire Pass

New York State Parks

Albany, NY 12238

*\*Applications are not accepted at NY State Park operated facilities.*

Once approved, a free Empire Pass will be mailed to the address on the application, or your existing Empire Pass will be renewed (please indicate on the application).

*Note: Annual reapplication, including the submission of current orders is required for as long as the program is offered. One free Empire Pass per Patriot Plan Benefit household.*

# Honoring Our Local Heroes at the Half Hollow Hills Community Library *Dix Hills, NY*



Chairman Steve Stern joined the Half Hollow Hills Community Library at the annual Veterans Testimonial Project & Open House. Veterans from across Suffolk County were recognized for their participation in the project, where they shared their experiences as service members, preserving our region's rich history of service and sacrifice.



The Assemblyman was also the proud sponsor of the food truck, Fire Engine Foods, a retired military truck.





# MEMORIAL DAY

May 26, 2025

***Honoring those who made the  
ultimate sacrifice***

***Stony Brook, NY***



Assemblyman Steve Stern with our local heroes, Director Fred Sganga, and other elected officials at the Long Island State Veterans Home Memorial Day Ceremony, presenting the keynote address to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice protecting our great nation.





# Korean War Veterans Day and Fort Drum Day at the Capitol



Chairman Steve Stern with Chair of the Veterans, Homeland Security, and Military Affairs Committee in the Senate, Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton, for Korean War Veterans Day at the Capitol, memorializing the service, bravery, and sacrifice of our Korean War veterans that is too often overlooked.



Assemblyman Steve Stern welcomed Brigadier General Joseph Escandon and Command Sergeant Major John Folger from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division on Fort Drum Day at the New York State Assembly.



# NEW YORK STATE IRAQ WAR COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL

**The New York State Iraq War Commemorative Medal was created to honor New York State Service Members who served during the Iraq War, in the timeframe of 10 March 2003 – 31 December 2021.**

## **Eligibility**

Service Member who served in Iraq between 20 March 2003 and 31 December 2021.

**Please see <https://dmna.ny.gov/awards/apply/iraq/> for further information, and to apply**

The New York State Iraq War Commemorative Medal does not provide the holder with any monetary benefits or disability compensation. It is simply an expression of support and appreciation from the New York State Legislature and the people of New York to veterans for their honorable military service.



# NEW YORK STATE AFGHANISTAN WAR COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL

**The New York State Afghanistan War Commemorative Medal was created to honor New York State Service Members who served during the Afghanistan War, in the time frame of 07 October 2001 – 30 August 2021.**

## **Eligibility**

Service Member who served in Afghanistan between 07 October 2001 and 30 August 2021.

**Please see <https://dmna.ny.gov/awards/apply/afghanistan/> for further information, and to apply**

The New York State Afghanistan War Commemorative Medal does not provide the holder with any monetary benefits or disability compensation. It is simply an expression of support and appreciation from the New York State Legislature and the people of New York to veterans for their honorable military service.

# NEW YORK STATE VIETNAM WAR COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL



**The New York State Vietnam War Commemorative Medal was created to honor New York State Service Members who served during the Vietnam War, in the timeframe of 01 November 1955 – 17 May 1975.**

## **Eligibility**

Service Member who served in one of the following locations between 01 November 1955 and 17 May 1975:

Vietnam

Thailand

Laos

Cambodia

its contiguous waters

Vietnam airspace

**Please see <https://dmna.ny.gov/awards/apply/vietnam/> for further information, and to apply**

The New York State Vietnam War Commemorative Medal does not provide the holder with any monetary benefits or disability compensation. It is simply an expression of support and appreciation from the New York State Legislature and the people of New York to veterans for their honorable military service.

# NEW YORK STATE KOREAN WAR COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL



**The New York State Korean War Commemorative Medal was created to honor New York State Service Members who served during the Korean War, in the timeframe of 27 June 1950 – 31 January 1955.**

## **Eligibility**

Service Member who served in one of the following locations between 27 June 1950 and 31 January 1955:

Korean Peninsula

its contiguous waters

Korean airspace

**Please see <https://dmna.ny.gov/awards/apply/korea/> for further information, and to apply**

The New York State Korean War Commemorative Medal does not provide the holder with any monetary benefits or disability compensation. It is simply an expression of support and appreciation from the New York State Legislature and the people of New York to veterans for their honorable military service.



# Veterans' Affairs Committee Updates

During the May 19, 2025 Veterans' Affairs Committee Meeting, the Committee passed 13 bills for a total of 23 bills voted out off committee year to date, making this the most productive session of the Committee in a **decade**.

## **Bills That Have Passed the Veterans' Affairs Committee Year to Date, 2025:**

### ***A06264, STERN***

Establishes members of the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the United States Public Health Services (USPHS) as veterans under NYS law consistent with federal law.

**PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY, 4/2/2025**

### ***A06579, 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**

### ***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**

## ***A04751A, RAJKUMAR***

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

**PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 3/4/2025**

## ***A06538, 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**

## ***A291A, BARRETT***

This bill ensures that the nation's newest service branch members, the Space Force, are included in the definition of veterans and uniformed services under New York State law.

**PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/21/2025**

## ***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.

**PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/5/2025**

## ***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.

## ***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.

**PASSED NYS ASSEMBLY 5/29/2025**

## ***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.

### ***A8475, BERGER***

This bill changes the references to the name of the Director of the Department of Veterans' Services to the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans' Services

### ***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.

### ***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.

### ***A08485, 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.