

NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CARL E. HEASTIE
SPEAKER

DIDI BARRETT
CHAIR



Didi Barrett

Assemblymember 106th District
Columbia County
Dutchess County

**THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY**

CHAIR
Veterans' Affairs
Legislative Women's Caucus

COMMITTEES
Agriculture
Environmental Conservation
Mental Health
Tourism, Parks, Arts and
Sports Development

December 15, 2020

Hon. Carl Heastie, Speaker
New York State Assembly
Room 932, Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Mr. Speaker:

It is with great pleasure that I forward to you the 2020 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 facilitate the establishment of a State Veterans' Cemetery (Chapter 345 of the Laws of 2020) and the authorization of the Outdoor Rx Act, which will reduce barriers for veteran engagement with the healing benefits of nature and outdoor activities (Chapter 282 of the Laws of 2020). The Committee also examined the impacts of COVID-19 on veterans, including holding a public hearing.

While I'm proud of the work we completed in 2020, 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 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Didi Barrett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Didi Barrett
Member of Assembly
Chair, Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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ANNUAL REPORT
NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Honorable Didi Barrett, Chair

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I. COMMITTEE JURISDICTION AND SUMMARY

The Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs evaluates legislation affecting approximately 750,000 New York State residents who unselfishly served their nation in the United States armed forces, including 58,855 New York State 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 a number of titles of New York State statute, principally: Civil Service Law, Executive Law, Military Law, Education Law, Real Property Tax Law, Public Health Law, and 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 program, educational assistance for certain veterans and their family members, and a State veterans' nursing home program.

This past legislative session, the Committee held three Committee meetings at which it considered 19 bills. Five bills passed both houses of the Legislature and were all 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, such as the committees on Governmental Operations, Transportation, Real Property Taxation, Health, Governmental Employees, Environmental Conservation, Election Law, Small Business, Mental Health, Labor, and Tourism, Parks, Arts, and Sports Development. As a result, the Committee Chair, members, and staff work closely with other committees to ensure that this unique population's needs are met.

II. 2020 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

A. Outdoor Recreation

Nature and outdoor activities have been recognized been used for health and healing improvement for centuries. For example, during World War I and World War II, service members worked in gardens to improve the function of injured limbs and increase mental functions, which was known as horticultural therapy. Recent studies have shown that there are benefits from spending time in nature, including walking through parks and historic sites or participating in organized outside activities including hiking, fishing or skiing. New York State is home to 180 State parks ranging from the shores of Long Island to the waters of Niagara Falls and including the Catskills and Adirondacks.

Outdoor Rx Act (A.8094-A Barrett; Chapter 282 of the Laws of 2020)

This law will require the Division of Veterans Services (DVS) to consult with the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Department of Health, and the Office of Mental Health to review issues relating to veterans' abilities to access state parks, lands, and facilities in order eliminate barriers to the restorative properties of nature.

B. State Veterans' cemetery

Beginning in early 2021, New York State will have six open national veterans' cemeteries located in Bath, Elmira, Schuylerville, Calverton, Farmingdale, and Pembroke. The Cypress Hills National Cemetery (Brooklyn) is closed to new internments. Furthermore, in federal Fiscal Year 2011, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) established the "Urban Initiative" project. This federal undertaking brought burial options closer to veterans by developing columbarium-only sites in five urban areas, including New York City. A columbarium-only cemetery located in St. Albans, Queens is expected to be completed in 2021. However, despite the presence of these national veterans' cemeteries, New York does not yet have a State veterans' cemetery.

The U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) State Cemetery Grants Program was established in 1978 to complement the VA's network of national cemeteries. The program assists states in providing gravesites in those areas where the NCA cannot fully satisfy veterans' burial needs. Public Law 105-368, which went into effect in 1999, authorized the VA to reimburse up to 100 percent of the development costs of an approved state veterans' cemetery project. The VA can now also provide reimbursement for equipment and construction; however, land acquisition, operation and maintenance are solely the responsibility of the state.

Establishing a State Veterans' Cemetery (A.10782 Barrett; Chapter 345 of the Laws of 2020)

The law removes certain barriers to establishing a New York State Veterans' Cemetery. In addition to streamlining the process, the law allows additional funding sources to be considered to help support the cemetery. Furthermore, the law requires the DVS to promote the availability of the Veterans Remembrance and Cemetery Maintenance and Operation Fund established in law in 2013.

C. Chapter Amendments

When the Legislature revisits a law soon after its passage to make technical amendments those bills are referred to as chapter amendments. The Committee considered the following chapter amendments this year:

Women Veterans Coordinator (A.8957 Hunter; Chapter 27 of the Laws of 2020)

Women veterans are the largest growing subgroup of veterans in the State, accounting for approximately eight percent of the total number of veterans. Chapter 480 of the Laws of 2019 amended the Women Veterans' Coordinator Law to clarify the duties of this position, including promoting veterans' human rights conferences, veterans' benefit and resource events, and veterans cultural competence training. In addition, the coordinator also has to prepare reports on women veterans' issues, including the demographics of women veterans and the unique needs of women veterans. This new law clarifies the scope of the reporting requirement.

Listing of Local Veterans' Service Agencies (A.8968 Stern; Chapter 48 of the Laws of 2020)

Veterans' services exist not only on the federal and state level, but on the local level as well. To better facilitate accessibility to local veterans' service agencies, the Legislature enacted Chapter 453 of the Laws of 2019 which requires the DVS to post on its website a listing of the local veterans' service agencies including the name, location, hours of operation, and contact information for each county and city veterans' service agency in the State. This new law clarifies that local veterans' service agencies are required to provide such information to DVS.

Information on Homeless Veterans (A.8969 Rozic; Chapter 42 of the Laws of 2020)

In 2019 the Legislature passed a law, Chapter 487, to help address the issue of homeless veterans in the State by requiring DVS, in consultation with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Department of Labor, and the Office of Children and Family Services to prepare reports to quantify the number of homeless veterans in the State. The report will analyze: New York veterans who are currently homeless or have been homeless within five years of being released from active duty; data on the number of children of homeless veterans and their placement; cases of military sexual trauma experienced by homeless veterans during active duty or military training; and the unemployment rate for veterans in the State. This new law clarifies the scope of the reporting requirement and authorizes its repeal on July 1, 2032.

D. Discharge Papers

One of the most important pieces of paperwork that soldiers receive at the end of a military deployment or when ending military service, is the DD 214 Form, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty. This document is issued by the United States Department of Defense (USDOD) upon a military service member's retirement, separation, or discharge from active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States, e.g. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard.

The DD 214 Form is used by various governmental agencies on the federal, state, and local levels. The form represents the complete, verified record of a service member's time in the military (both Active and Reserve), awards and medals, and other pertinent service information, including, but not limited to, highest rate and pay grade held on active duty, total combat service and/or overseas service, Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) or Navy officer designator, and a record of training and schools completed. The document also contains codes, known as Separation Designator/Separation Justification Codes and Reenlistment Eligibility Codes, used by the Armed Forces to describe the service member's reason for discharge, and in the case of enlisted personnel, their reenlisted eligibility. In addition, the type of military discharge is also listed on the Form and includes: Honorable Discharge; General Discharge; Other Than Honorable Conditions Discharge; Bad Conduct Discharge, Dishonorable Discharge; Officer Discharge and Entry Level Separation.

“Bad Papers” Technical Amendment (A.8921 Barrett; Passed the Assembly)

Many veterans received less than honorable discharges as a result of a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), or as a result of sexual orientation, gender or expression, including pursuant to the federal “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Policy.” These discharges were determined at the federal level and cannot be revised by the State, however, a number of State benefits require an honorable discharge. In 2019, legislation was enacted into law to remedy that problem and help ensure that veterans with “qualifying conditions,” including PTSD, TBI, MST, and “discharged LGBT veterans” are eligible to receive benefits. However, that law limited the entities able to certify eligibility. This bill would expand such entities to include an individual licensed to provide health care in New York State.

Information Available to Local Veterans’ Service Agencies (A.10196 Jean-Pierre; Passed Assembly)

This legislation would require DVS to forward a copy of a veteran's DD 214 Form to the appropriate local veterans' service agency within sixty days of receipt. Also, this legislation would authorize a representative of a funeral firm assisting with the burial of a veteran to obtain a copy of an honorable discharge certificate that has been filed at the county clerk's office. Lastly, the bill would make a DD 214 Form available for public inspection and copying in accordance with the archival schedule adopted by the National Archives.

E. Additional Legislation

Role of Peacetime Veterans in County Veterans Service Agencies

(A.7573 Gunther; Passed Assembly)

This legislation would permit veterans who have served during peacetime to be eligible for the position of a County Veterans Service Agency director if he or she meets all of the other qualifications.

Increased Information on Certain Medical Conditions

(A.8114 Barrett; Passed Assembly)

This legislation would require the Division of Veterans' Service to provide information on the Division's website concerning Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

III. BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

A. New York State Division of Veterans' Services

The New York State Division of Veterans' Services (DVS) assists, counsels, and advocates for veterans, military personnel, and their families.

Veterans' Benefits Advising Program

The Veterans' Benefits Advising Program, formerly known as the Counseling Services Program, provides counseling and services through a statewide network of State veteran counselors. The counselors, all of whom are veterans, and support staff help veterans complete and file applications for state, federal, and private benefits and services. Counselors also serve veterans through outreach to the federal Department of Veterans' Affairs medical centers, senior centers, State and local veterans' nursing homes, and public assistance offices. State veteran counselors help ensure that active duty military personnel and their families receive the supplemental benefits to which they are entitled. State veteran counselors receive professional training in veterans' benefits counseling and are accredited by the USDVA. The State Budget for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020-21 included an allocation of \$11,647,000 for services and expenses related to the Veterans' Benefits Advising Program.

County and City Veterans' Service Agencies

County and city veterans' service agencies are mandated by State law to inform members of the armed forces, reserves, organized militia, and veterans and their families about available education, retraining, medical, and other rehabilitative services and facilities. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$1,380,000 for the County and City Veterans' Service Agencies.

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 Rochester veterans' court. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$250,000 for the services and expenses related to the Veterans' Outreach Center, Inc.

Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders (SAGE)

Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders (SAGE) has established a comprehensive program for New York State's elderly LGBT veterans that provides legal counsel, benefits advocacy, and enhanced wraparound services in order to improve veterans' income security and overall well-being. In addition, representation will enable LGBT veterans currently on public assistance, Medicaid, or other State subsidy programs to apply for veterans' benefits including, but not limited to, income, medical, spousal, and survivor benefits. The SAGE program will provide 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 2020-21 included an appropriation of \$150,000 to implement SAGE's comprehensive program for New York State's elderly LGBT veterans. 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, 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 (non-criminal) 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 2020-21 included an allocation of \$330,000 for this program. 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-based public defenders offices, legal aid agencies, and assigned counsel staff. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$500,000 for this Program, and an additional \$220,000 for an expansion to Long Island. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive budget.

Helmets to Hardhats Program

Helmets to Hardhats is a charitable corporation that assists transitioning active duty veterans, as well as members of the Reserves or National Guard, in gaining employment with the building trades. The Program has been actively placing military veterans in building-trades affiliated apprenticeship programs across the country since 2003 and since 2013 in the City of New York. The program has since been expanded to include Upstate New York. The Program, which is being expanded statewide, 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 2020-21 included \$200,000 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 whereby congressional-chartered veterans' organizations are selected by the State and counties to provide these services. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 includes 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 29 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, and mental illness. These special courts help veterans by linking them with community service and support, as well as local, state, and federal agencies specializing in veterans' services. One of the key components of these courts is 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 2020-21 included an allocation of \$1,000,000 for the following purposes: 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 linkages at the national, state, and local level. Funds will be made available pursuant to Request for Proposals for congressional chartered veterans' organizations and requests from the Office of Court Administration (OCA) for the various veterans' treatment courts. The \$1 million will be split evenly to service the veteran-to-veteran programs maintained by veterans' service organizations and the veteran mentor support system directed by the criminal justice services.

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 include foreclosure prevention and other consumer protection matters, family law assistance, discharge upgrades, and complex appeals regarding VA benefits. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 allocated \$250,000 for this Initiative.

Veterans of Foreign Wars, NYS Chapter Field Service Operation

In order to be a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (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 2020-21 included an allocation of \$125,000 for the services and expenses of the VFW Chapter Field Service Operation. 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 in obtaining assistance, food, and services. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$100,000 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. Its model of service helps service members transition to civilian life through wellness-enhancing programming. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$250,000 for the services and expenses of the Clear Path for Veterans organization. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive budget.

Veterans' Education Program

The Veterans' Education Program is operated by DVS. The program is located in Albany and New York City and investigates and approves post-secondary educational and vocational institutions for the use of the Division's education benefits and approves on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$2,025,000 for this Program.

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. VVA's founding principle is "never again will one generation of veterans abandon another." The Council's purpose is to help foster, encourage, and promote the improvement of the condition of Vietnam-era veterans and assists disabled and needy military veterans, including, but not limited to, Vietnam-era veterans and their dependents, and the widows and orphans of deceased veterans. The Council members also provide assistance in navigating the various benefits available to veterans and their family members. The SFY 2020-21 budget included an allocation of \$50,000 to the Vietnam Veterans of America New York State Chapter. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive budget.

Administration Programs

The Administration Program is composed of two benefit components: Supplemental Burial and Gold Star Parents Annuity. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$1,479,000, which includes funding for administrative personnel and operational expenses.

New York State Supplemental Burial Benefits

New York State offers a supplemental burial benefits program to eligible families of military personnel killed in combat, or wounded in combat but dead from their wounds outside of the combat zone. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$400,000 for these Benefits.

Gold Star Parents

Gold Star Parents refer to parents who have lost children in the armed services during a time of war. This appropriation supports the payment of a \$500 annuity to a Gold Star Parent. Up to two parents may claim this annual benefit. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$599,000 for such payments.

Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance Program

The Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance Program provides legally blind wartime veterans or surviving un-remarried spouses of legally blind wartime veterans who live in New York with an annuity payment. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$6,380,000.

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 are located in the Saratoga Armory in Saratoga Springs, New York. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$1,000,000 for: services and expenses related to youth academic and drug demand reduction programs; the New York Guard; the New York Naval Militia; the New York State Military Museum; the Veterans Research Center; and the preservation and restoration of historic artifacts. In addition, the Budget included an allocation of \$10,000 (from donated funds) for improvements to the Museum and Research Center.

Recruitment Incentive and Retention Program

Chapter 268 of the Laws of 1996 established the Recruitment Incentive and Retention Program to provide eligible members of the New York Army National Guard, the New York Air National Guard, and the New York Naval Militia with a tuition benefit for undergraduate study. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an appropriation of \$3,000,000 for this Program.

C. Office of Mental Health

Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program

The PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program, which provides “peer-to-peer” counseling between veterans who personally understand the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury, was first funded in the 2012 budget. It began operating in four test counties: Suffolk, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Jefferson, and has since been expanded to fund 20 additional counties: Broome, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Columbia, Dutchess, Erie, Genesee, Jefferson, Monroe, Nassau, Niagara, Onondaga, Orange, Orleans, Putnam, Rensselaer, Rockland, Saratoga, Suffolk, Sullivan, Ulster, Washington, Westchester, and Wyoming. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$4.5 million to fund all 25 counties as well as the University at Albany School of Social Welfare. The SFY 2020-21 appropriation also included \$400,000 for New York City.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a public health concern that affects all New Yorkers. The State Budget included 1,000,000 for services and expenses to suicide prevention efforts for veterans, first responders, law enforcement, and corrections officers.

D. Office of Children and Families

The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an appropriation of \$5,000,000 for permanent, emergency, and transitional housing for veterans in accordance with Article 2A of the Social Services Law. However, if there are an insufficient number of viable veterans’ proposals any remaining funds can be used for other priority groups.

E. Department of Agriculture and Markets

Cornell Small Farms Program

The Cornell Small Farms Program, funded previously in the State budget as part of a first-in-the-nation pilot program, provides resources and training to veterans seeking to become farmers. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$115,000 to help establish up to five veteran-owned farms. This was a legislative addition to the proposed Executive budget.

F. Division of Criminal Justice Services

Legal Services Assistance Fund (LSAF)

The Legal Services Assistance Fund was established pursuant to Chapter 524 of the Laws of 2008 to assist in the provision of and the reimbursement of expenses incurred by local government agencies and not-for-profit providers or their employees relating to providing criminal or civil legal services. The State budget for SFY 2020-21 included an allocation of \$950,000 for domestic and veterans’ legal services programs.

ARTICLE VII LANGUAGE BILLS

A.9508-C Budget

Chapter 58 of the Laws of 2020

Subpart A Item Q

This Subpart extends, from June 16, 2020, to June 16, 2022, provisions of law that revive time-barred causes of action for an injury or death caused by contact with or exposure to phenoxy herbicides for those persons serving as members of the armed forces in Indo-China from February 28, 1961, through May 7, 1975

A.9508-C Budget

Chapter 58 of the Laws of 2020

Part DD

This Part amends the Infrastructure Investment Act to require certain contracts to comply with service-disabled veteran-owned business enterprises requirements, including negotiating prices in certain lump-sum contracts. Contracts entered into by authorized State entities must now also comply with the objectives and goals of the service-disabled veteran-owned business enterprises pursuant to Article 17-b of the Executive Law. The authorized State entities include: NYS Thruway Authority; Department of Transportation; Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; Department of Environmental Conservation, NYS Bridge Authority; Office of General Services; Dormitory Authority; Urban Development Corporation; State University Construction Fund; NYS Olympic Regional Development Authority and the Battery Park City Authority.

IV. HONORING VETERANS THROUGH LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS

Commemorating the 101st Anniversary of The American Legion (Resolution No. 790, Barrett)

The American Legion is a veteran organization that was founded in Paris on March 15, 1919, by three officers of the American Expeditionary Forces, who fought in World War I. On May 8, 1919, the St. Louis Caucus was held to organize the soldiers and sailors in every state to become members of the new organization. On May 24, 1919, the national organization issued the Department of New York American Legion its charter. On September 16, 1919, the United States Congress chartered The American Legion. This resolution commemorates the 101st anniversary of The American Legion.

Commemorating the 76th Anniversary of the D-Day Invasion on June 6, 2020 (Resolution No. 945, Barrett)

On June 6, 1944, the Allied Forces in Europe combined for the extensive aerial and sea assault operation, known as the D-Day Invasion, at the beaches of Normandy, France. This military undertaking would change the direction of World War II. The code-name was Operation Overlord, consisting of five infantry divisions, two American, two British, and one Canadian, assigned to beaches code-named, from west to east, Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. This resolution commemorates the 76th anniversary of one of the largest successful amphibious military assaults in history.

Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the American Legion Auxiliary Department of New York (Resolution No. 786, Barrett)

The American Legion Auxiliary Department of New York was founded in 1919 and has promoted patriotism, encouraged good citizenship, and has supported the principles and endeavors of all the American Legion for 100 years. The Legion Auxiliary administers hundreds of volunteer programs, gives tens of thousands of hours to its communities and to veterans, and raises millions of dollars to support its own programs as well as other charities. This resolution commemorates the 100th anniversary of The American Legion Auxiliary Department of New York.

Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 358 of Ballston Spa, New York (Resolution No. 796, Walsh)

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 358 of Ballston Spa has a noble past, accomplishing its mission of supporting veterans and their families in the times of need and performing its good deeds in a spirit of comradeship true to the highest traditions of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America. This resolution commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 358.

Mourning the Death of EJ Knapik, United States Navy, Distinguished Citizen and Devoted Member of his Community (Resolution No. 946, Santabarbara)

EJ Knapik served his nation as a petty officer aboard the USS Miami stationed in the Pacific during World War II. He also served for more than thirty years as Legislative Chairman for the American Veterans (AMVETS) and was a past State Commander. He also received the AMVETS Silver Helmet Award, known as the Veterans Oscar, in 2009. AMVETS is a national organization established by Congress. In addition, Mr. Knapik served for a number of years as a trustee for the Saratoga National Cemetery Support Group, and as a member of the committees that established various Memorials in the State including the New York State Vietnam Memorial, Korean War Memorial, and the World War II Memorial. This resolution mourns his death.

Memorializing June 12, 2020 as Women Veterans Recognition Day in the State of New York (Resolution No. 951, Hunter)

On June 12, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Women's Armed Services Act of 1948 (PL 625-80th Congress); this law ensured that women would have a permanent place in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. This resolution memorializes June 12, 2020, as Women Veterans Day in the State of New York in recognition of the contributions of New York's women veterans and to educate the people of the State concerning the role of women in our military.

V. MEMORIALIZING THE GOVERNOR TO PROCLAIM VETERAN-RELATED EVENTS

Memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim March 29, 2020, as Vietnam Veterans' Day (Resolution No. 889, Barrett)

More than three million American service members fought in the Vietnam War from 1961 to 1975. This resolution memorializes Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to honor that service and proclaim March 29, 2020, as Vietnam Veterans' Day.

Memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim April 9, 2020, as Yellow Ribbon Day (Resolution No. 897, Stec)

Yellow ribbons are symbols that citizens can display to show support for and solidarity with the service members around the world protecting our nation. This resolution memorializes Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim April 9, 2020, as Yellow Ribbon Day.

Memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim April 11, 2020, as Submarine Day (Resolution No. 892, 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. A submarine is a watercraft capable of independent operation underwater. The submarine has played a vital part in wars in which our Nation's freedom was at stake and in the preservation of naval security and strategic readiness. This resolution memorializes Governor Cuomo to proclaim April 11, 2020, as Submarine Day.

Memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim September 20, 2020 a POW/MIA Day in the State of New York (Resolution No. 924, Cusick)

Each year, the third Friday in September is set aside to honor the commitment and sacrifices made by this nation's Prisoners of War (POW) and those who are still Missing in Action (MIA), as well as their families. Currently, there are 73,539 persons unaccounted for from World War I, 7,882 from the Korean War, 126 from the Cold War, 1,641 from the Vietnam War and 6 from recent conflicts, for a total of 83,194 soldiers either held as Prisoners of War or classified as Missing in Action. This resolution memorializes Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim September 20, 2020, as POW/MIA Day in the State of New York to ensure all New Yorkers remember to stand behind those who served and to make sure we do everything we can to account for those who have never returned.

VI. OTHER ACTIVITIES BY THE VETERANS' COMMITTEE

A. Hearings and Roundtables

Impacts of COVID-19 on Veterans

On August 14, 2020, the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Women Veterans in conjunction with the New York State Senate Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs held a virtual public hearing on the impacts of COVID-19 on New York's veterans. The hearing explored veteran-specific impacts of COVID-19 including the provision of care at State veterans' nursing homes, access to health and mental health services, loss of employment opportunities and ways to protect veterans from future adverse impacts. Participants included the New York State Division of Veterans' Services, the New York City Department of Veterans' Services, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of New York, SAGE, the New York State County Veterans Service Officers, and a representative of the Montrose Veterans Nursing Home Board of Visitors.

B. Subcommittee on Women Veterans

The Subcommittee on Women Veterans sponsored the 27th annual Women Veterans' Recognition Day on June 3, 2020, hosting its first virtual program to recognize and celebrate the brave women who so valiantly served our nation. The panelists included: Michael Haynie Vice Chancellor at Syracuse University; Marlene Roll, Past State Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and current Legislative Chair of the VFW; Wendy Burch, Executive Director at the National Alliance on Mental Health, and Nick Armstrong, Senior Director for Research and Analytics at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University.

C. Other Veterans-Related Events

10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Day in the State of New York

The 10th Mountain Division was at the New York State Capitol and Legislative Office Building on February 26, 2020, for its annual day of providing information, including interactive displays by troops designed to educate legislators and staff about the importance of Fort Drum to the State. Among those in attendance was General Brian J. Mennes, a Buffalo native, West Point graduate, and the first native New Yorker to lead the 10th Mountain Division. As of September 2018, there were 14,960 soldiers assigned to Fort Drum and approximately 4,100 civilians employed. Fort Drum is the largest "Single Site" employer in New York State. Approximately 53% of the soldiers have family members, which means an estimated 7,800 military families are associated with Fort Drum.

VII. OUTLOOK FOR 2021

The Committee is looking forward to a productive year in 2021 and will continue to work with the DVS, the Division of Military and Naval Affairs, other State agencies, veterans' organizations, and individual veterans throughout New York State to develop legislation to assist the veterans of the State.

The issues that the Committee intends to pursue include the following:

- improving veterans' mental health and 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;
- reviewing veterans' employment opportunities;
- increasing outreach to veterans of all ages in all areas of the State;
- tailoring outreach to women and minority veterans to better identify and respond to their needs;
- continuing to review any COVID-19 issues, such as housing stability, specific to veterans;
- increasing access to programs such as the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Counseling Program; and
- reviewing supportive measures for Veterans Service Organizations, like the VFW and American Legion.

The Committee will continue to strive to address the needs of New York's more than 700,000 veterans and their families.

APPENDIX A
2020 SUMMARY SHEET

Summary of Action on All Bills Referred to the Committee on
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Final Action	<u>Assembly</u> <u>Bills</u>	<u>Senate</u> <u>Bills</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Bills Reported With or Without Amendment</u>			
To Floor; Not Returning to Committee (Favorable)	4	0	4
To Ways & Means	4	0	4
To Codes	0	0	0
To Rules	1	0	1
To Judiciary	0	0	0
Total	9	0	9
<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>	10	0	10
<u>Bills Never Reported or Held in Committee</u>	0	0	0
<u>Bills Having Enacting Clause Stricken</u>	1	0	1
<u>Motion to Discharge Lost</u>	0	0	0
TOTAL BILLS IN COMMITTEE	58	4	62
TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD		3	

APPENDIX B

COMMITTEE CHAPTERS/VETOES

Assembly Bill	Sponsor	Description	Final Action
A.8957	Hunter	Requires reports on the status of New York's women veterans to be compiled based on information available to DVS.	Chapter 27
A.8969	Rozic	Requires reports on the status of New York's homeless veterans to be compiled based on information available to DVS.	Chapter 42
A.8968	Stern	Requires local veterans' services agencies to provide certain operating information to DVS.	Chapter 48
A.8094	Barrett	Establishes the Outdoor Rx Act.	Chapter 282
A.10782	Barrett	Removes certain restrictions on the establishment of a State veterans' cemetery and requires DVS to increase awareness of the Veterans Remembrance Cemetery and Operations Fund.	Chapter 345

APPENDIX C

COMMITTEE BILLS THAT PASSED THE ASSEMBLY ONLY

Assembly Bill	Sponsor	Description
A.7573	Gunther	Permits peacetime veterans to be eligible for the position of county veterans' service agency director.
A.8114	Barrett	Requires DVS to provide additional information concerning PTSD and TBI.
A.8921	Barrett	Permits any individuals licensed to provide health care in the State to make determinations regarding qualifying conditions.
A.10196	Jean-Pierre	Makes veteran discharge information available to local service agencies.