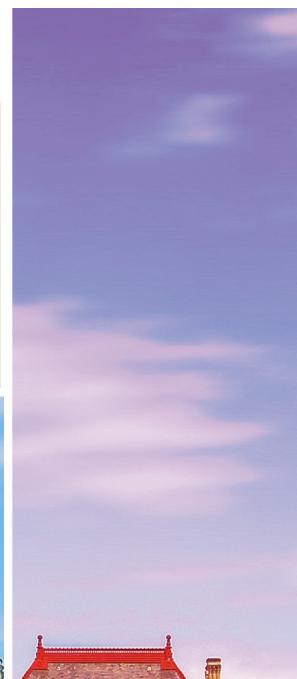
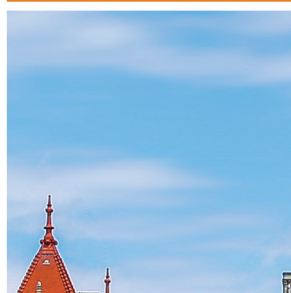
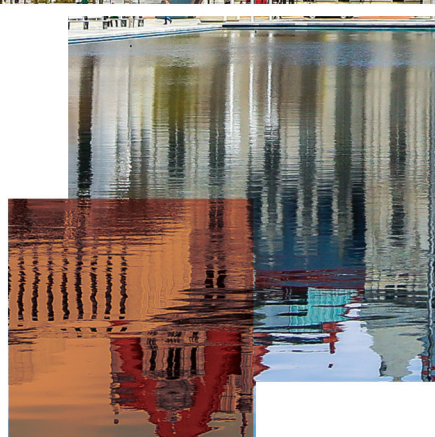
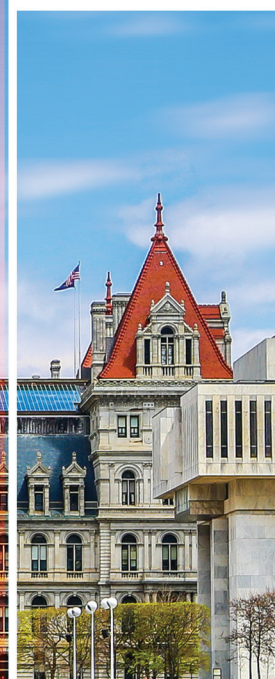


The New York State Assembly
Annual Report



**20
25**



**Committee on
Veterans' Affairs**

Speaker Carl E. Heastie
Steve Stern, CHAIR



Steve Stern
Assemblyman
10th District

CHAIR
Committee on
Veterans' Affairs

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

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Banks
Economic Development,
Job Creation Commerce,
and Industry
Energy

MEMBER
Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force
Asian Taskforce

December 15, 2025

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 2025 Annual Report of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

The Committee had a very productive year, with several significant pieces of legislation becoming law, including the Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act (Chapter 491) and an authorization for municipalities to offer a real property tax exemption for active military members who served active duty in a combat zone (Chapter 677). The Committee, in conjunction with the Assembly Standing Committee on Mental Health, also held a public hearing on increasing veteran access to mental health services.

While I am proud of the work we completed during my first year as Chair, much more work remains. In the coming year, the Committee will focus on how to best connect veterans to services - including county-level services, and mental and behavioral health resources. The Committee also will continue to examine issues related to older veterans, women veterans, homeless veterans, and employment.

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,

Steve Stern
Chair, New York State Assembly Veterans' Committee

2025 ANNUAL REPORT
NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Honorable Steve Stern, Chair

Committee Members

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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, 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, a state veterans cemetery in the Finger Lakes and State veterans' nursing homes. This past legislative session, the Committee held five Committee meetings at which it considered 26 bills. Eleven bills passed both houses of the Legislature, 9 were signed into law by the Governor, and two were vetoed.

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 and staff work closely with those committees to ensure that this unique population's needs are met.

II. 2025 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 two chapter amendments this year:

Maternity Care Coordination Program for Veterans (A.2058 Cunningham; Chapter 65 of the Laws of 2025)

Chapter 623 of the Laws of 2024 required the Women Veterans’ Coordinator to develop and implement a maternity healthcare program for pregnant and postpartum veterans. The chapter amendment modified the duties of the Women Veterans’ Coordinator and the information the Commissioner of Health is required to share to ensure effective implementation of the process.

Alex R. Jimenez NYS Military Immigrant Family Program (A.2435 Cruz; Chapter 69 of the Laws of 2025)

Chapter 625 of the Laws of the 2024 implemented the Alex R. Jimenez NYS Military Immigrant Family Program, which established a program within the Office for New Americans to assist non-citizen uniformed service members, veterans, reserve component members, and their family members in securing American citizenship and legal immigration status. This chapter amendment makes several technical changes to facilitate implementation.

B. Veterans’ Benefits

Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act (A.8476 Stern; Chapter 491 of the Laws of 2025)

The GUARD VA Benefits Act requires the Department of Veterans’ Services (DVS) to establish a public outreach program to raise awareness of fraud in veterans’ benefits matters, and to prohibit any entity from soliciting or charging any fee or compensation for veterans’ benefit matters, except as permitted under State or federal law. Violators will be subject to a penalty of up to \$2,500 in a private right of action, and/or a civil penalty of up to \$10,000. This law also establishes the crime of “unlawful compensation of veterans’ benefits” as a Class A misdemeanor. Any resulting penalty money would be deposited into the Veterans’ Services Fund to provide grants to veterans’ organizations providing representation in veterans’ benefits matters.

C. Department of Veterans’ Services

Notification of Service Member Release or Discharge (A.4649-A Rajkumar; Veto 104)

This bill would require DVS to forward a copy of a veterans’ certificate of release or discharge from active duty to the appropriate local Veterans’ Service Organization (VSO) within 60 days of receiving it from the United States government. The certificates would be protected as personal confidential information under Article 6-A of the Public Officers Law and could only be used to provide information and assistance with state and federal benefits.

**Access to Department of Civil Services Employment Programs
(A.4751-A Rajkumar; Chapter 490 of the Laws of 2025)**

This law directs DVS to provide virtual links to appropriate Department of Civil Service employment programs. The law also requires DVS and local Veterans' Service Organizations (VSOs) to include civil service positions reserved for disabled veterans as part of their existing obligations to assist veterans with employment matters.

**Veterans' Healthcare Study
(A.5155 Stern; Veto 67)**

This bill would require DVS, in consultation with the Department of Health, to complete a comprehensive study regarding veteran healthcare by the end of 2027. Specifically, the study would examine the healthcare needs of veterans and their families, whether existing services and resources are adequate to meet those needs, and ways to improve their access to affordable, quality healthcare.

**Volunteer Postings with Municipal Emergency Service Providers
(A.8485 Stern; Chapter 666 of the Laws of 2025)**

This law requires the Department of Veterans' Services to provide information on the Department's website related to volunteer postings with municipal emergency medical services providers and volunteer fire departments. The law also requires the Department to post any relevant application forms on the Department's employment portal that can be used by a qualified veteran to apply for volunteer opportunities.

E. Miscellaneous

**Including the Space Force within the Definition of "Veteran"
(A.291-A Barrett; Chapter 611 of the Laws of 2025)**

The United States Space Force was established in 2019, and its members are treated as veterans under federal law. This law conforms several provisions of State law with federal law, including the definition of "veteran."

**Including Certain Service Members Within the Definition of "Veteran"
(A.6264 Stern; Chapter 612 of the Laws of 2025)**

This law revises the definition of "veteran" to include people who served honorably in the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) or the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) within the definition of "veteran." These changes will conform the state's definition to federal law and ensure those service members receive the benefits they deserve.

**Real Property Tax Exemption for Active Service Members
(A.6579 Stern; Chapter 677 of the Laws of 2025)**

This law authorizes municipalities, by local law or resolution, to establish a real property tax exemption of up to 25 percent of the assessed value of residential real property for active service members who performed active duty in a combat zone.

III. BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

A. New York State Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)

The DVS assists, counsels, and advocates for veterans, military personnel, and their families. The enacted State Budget contains an All-Funds appropriation of \$36.2 million, an increase of \$3.5 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. DVS also offers training and continuing education to veterans' service officers of city and county Veterans Service Agencies who provide benefits advising at the local level. The State Budget for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$20,431,000, which includes both State Operations and Aid to Localities funding, and is a \$2 million dollar increase from the previous fiscal year.

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 to enroll students using the GI Bill and other VA education benefits, including approval of on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$2,221,000 for this program.

Administration Programs

DVS Administration Programs include Supplemental Burial Benefits, Gold Star Parents Annuity, and State Veterans Cemetery operations:

- **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 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$400,000 for these benefits.

- **Gold Star Parents**

Gold Star Parents have lost their children in the armed services during a time of war or conflict and are eligible to receive an annuity payment. In 2025, the annuity amount was \$602.90. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$699,000 for future annuities, representing a \$100,000 increase from the previous fiscal year.

- **State Veterans' Cemetery Operations**

The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included \$900,000 for contractual services related to veterans' cemetery operations.

Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance Program

The Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance Program provides an annuity to legally blind wartime veterans and surviving un-remarried spouses of such veterans, who live in New York. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$6,380,000 for these annuities.

Burial Services for Indigent Veterans

Chapter 579 of the Laws of 2015, and Chapter 29 of the Laws of 2016, were enacted to provide dignified burials to indigent veterans. When a veteran dies leaving no next of kin and insufficient funds to pay for a burial, the City of New York and counties outside the City, are required to request congressionally chartered veterans' organizations to engage the services of a funeral firm to conduct funeral and burial services. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included a sub-allocation of \$100,000 to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to reimburse veterans' organizations for providing these burial services for indigent veterans.

Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund

The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included \$500,000 to assist veterans who are confronting emergency housing needs and lacking sufficient money to cover the immediate costs.

Capital Projects

The Veterans' Nonprofit Capital Program (VNCP)

The Legislature first authorized VNCP with an appropriation of \$5 million in 2022, to fund grants for capital improvements to facilities owned or controlled by veteran nonprofit organizations. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 reappropriated the remainder of VNCP funding to ensure that grants continue to be available.

State Veterans' Cemetery Operation-Finger Lakes

The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included a \$2 million appropriation for the design, construction, and operation of the State veterans' cemetery. The cemetery also received \$2,000,000 in federal funds for design, construction, maintenance and operations.

Aid to Localities

County and City Veterans' Service Agencies

County and city Veterans' Service Agencies (VSAs) are mandated by State law to assist 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 2025-2026 included an appropriation of \$2.38 million for 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 a variety of counseling services and residential programs for homeless veterans, and an alternative to incarceration program through the Monroe County Veterans' Treatment Court. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$350,000 for the Veterans' Outreach Center.

Alex R. Jimenez New York State Military Immigrant Legacy Program

The Alex R. Jimenez New York State Military Immigrant Legacy Program was established in 2025 to honor the sacrifices of all non-citizen service members and their families by assisting non-citizen uniformed service members, veterans, reserve component members, and their family members in securing American citizenship and legal immigration status. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$525,000 for expenses related to this program.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a public health concern that affects all New Yorkers, but studies have shown that veterans are at even higher risk. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$1 million for the services and expenses of suicide prevention initiatives.

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

SAGE has established a comprehensive program for New York's elderly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) veterans that provides veterans with legal counsel, including assistance in navigating the federal discharge upgrade process, benefits advocacy, and enhanced wraparound services. The State Budget for SFY 2025-2026 included an appropriation of \$200,000 for SAGE.

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 to address the unique legal problems faced by the more than 120,000 veterans and their families living in Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, and Westchester counties. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included \$405,000.

Legal Services of Long Island Veterans' Rights Project

The Veterans Advocacy Project of Legal Services of Long Island provides a full range of civil legal services to resolve the unique legal challenges faced by the over 81,000 veterans living in Nassau and Suffolk counties. The 2025-26 State Budget included an appropriation of \$120,000 for the services and expenses of the Veterans Advocacy Project.

New York State Defenders Association Veterans Defense Program

The Veterans Defense Program (VDP) helps the most vulnerable veterans by facilitating treatment and assisting defense attorneys who represent veterans with mental health issues. The NYS 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 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$470,000 for this Program, and an additional \$220,000 for an expansion to include Long Island.

Helmets to Hardhats

Helmets to Hardhats has assisted transitioning active-duty military service members, veterans, reserves, and national guard members, in gaining employment with the building trades 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 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$275,000.

Veteran-to-Veteran Support Services

Currently, there are 36 veteran treatment courts statewide to address the needs of veterans 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 and governmental services and support. A key component of these courts are the veterans who serve as volunteer mentors to motivate and help veterans not only to navigate the criminal justice system but also to reintegrate into civilian society. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$1 million 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.

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. The clinics provide assistance including foreclosure prevention, consumer protection matters, family law, discharge upgrades, and complex appeals regarding VA benefits. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 allocated \$250,000 for this initiative.

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

VFW is a congressionally chartered veterans service organization. VFW veteran service officers help veterans navigate the various benefits available on the federal, state, and local level. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$125,000 for VFW services and expenses.

Clear Path for Veterans

Clear Path for Veterans' mission is to assist service members, veterans, and their families through supportive wellness-enhancing programs and services in a safe, respectful environment, to transition to civilian life. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$325,000 for the services and expenses of Clear Path.

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 a variety of issues including: HUD-VA supportive housing; evictions; debt collection/wage garnishment; child support; wills and powers of attorney; and Social Security Disability/Social Security Income. VJP has helped at least 14,600 veterans and their family members since being established in 2011. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$200,000 for VJP's services and expenses.

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. Initially founded in 1979 to serve Vietnam War veterans, the mission of VVA has since 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 SFY 2025-26 included an allocation of \$100,000 for the VVA New York State Council.

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 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 2025-26 included \$150,000 for studies to be conducted by DVS, Sierra Club Military Outdoors, Cornell University, and SUNY Cortland.

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 2025-26 included \$100,000 for capital improvements.

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 2025-26 included \$100,000 to support the Center.

African American Veterans Memorial, Inc.

The African American Veterans Memorial is located at the Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park and is the first memorial to recognize the contributions of African Americans who served and are currently serving in all branches of the military. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included \$500,000 for this memorial.

Enlisted For Life

Enlisted for Life is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help homeless veterans and at-risk veterans and their families. The State Budget for the SFY 2025-26 included \$100,000 for development of a center to provide temporary housing, education, and meals.

Touro University Law Center Veterans' Clinic

The Touro University Law Center provides free legal services to veterans and service members. Priority is granted to matters that will prevent or relieve homelessness or remove barriers to reintegration of veterans into civilian life. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 included \$125,000 for the clinic, which represents a \$45,000 increase from the previous fiscal year.

B. Division of Military and Naval Affairs

New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center

The NYS Military Museum and Veterans Research Center is located at the Saratoga Armory in Saratoga Springs, New York. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 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 NY Guard, the NY Naval Militia, the Veterans' Research Center, and the preservation and restoration of historic artifacts.

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. The State Budget for SFY 2025-26 contained an appropriation of \$8,023,600 and was expanded to all counties and New York City.

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 2025-256 included \$1 million for services and expenses of suicide prevention efforts for veterans, first responders, law enforcement, and corrections officers. Another \$2 million was included in the State Budget for SFY 2025-26 for services and expenses of organizations related to suicide prevention, peer-to-peer training, and the mental health supports and services for veterans and first responders, including disaster relief workers.

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 2025-26 included an appropriation of \$50,000 for this Program.

E. Article VII Language Bills

Chapter 56 of the Laws of 2025

(A.3006-C, Part Y)

This part expands eligibility for the Gold Star Annuity Program to include parents, spouses, and minor children of army servicemembers who died on active duty.

Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2025

(A.3009-C, Part CC)

This part extends the Hire-a-Vet credit for an additional three years, through 2028.

IV. VETERAN-RELATED LAWS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Higher Education Committee

Veteran Family Educational Attainment Act

(A.3240-A; Dinowitz; Chapter 688 of the Laws of 2025)

This law authorizes veterans to transfer any unused veteran tuition award (VTA) program benefits to a designated immediate family member. This law recognizes the individual sacrifices that the family members of veterans have made and allows for a broader range of individuals to access veteran benefits. The program is authorized to issue up to 100 tuition award transfers annually.

Real Property Taxation Committee

Real Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans

(A.74-A; Pheffer Amato; Chapter 672 of the Laws of 2025)

This law authorizes municipalities, at local option, to adopt a local law providing an exemption on all real property taxes, special district charges, and assessments, for veterans with a 100% service-related disability as determined by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs.

V. LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS

Honoring Veterans

Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion's Deployment (Resolution No. 137, Manktelow)

Formed in 1945, the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was the only all-Black, all-female battalion deployed overseas during World War II. The mission of the 6888th Battalion was to sort and deliver mail to soldiers stationed in Europe, boosting the morale of soldiers and providing critical support to the war effort. Despite facing significant racial and gender-based discrimination, the 6888th Battalion performed admirably and defied all expectations. This resolution commemorates the 80th anniversary of the deployment of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion and honors their various accomplishments.

Commending the Jewish War Veterans (Resolution No. 152, Lunsford)

Founded March 15, 1896, by 63 Jewish American Civil War veterans, Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV) is the oldest known veterans' organization in the country. Since its inception, the JWV has combatted bigotry and antisemitism while simultaneously working to support the Jewish veteran community. Today, the JWV continues to serve the Nation's veterans through active programs for wounded individuals and patients in Veterans Administration hospitals. This resolution commends the work that the JWV has done for the Nation's veterans.

Recognizing March 10, 2025, as Harriet Tubman Day (Resolution No. 179, Meeks)

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 life achievements.

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the End of the Vietnam War (Resolution No. 243, Santabarbara)

On March 29, 1975, the 13-year Vietnam War came to an end after the last American troops flew out of Saigon. During the War, 58,000 Americans gave their lives in service of their Country, and countless others returned home bearing both physical wounds and invisible scars. This resolution commemorates the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, and honors the sacrifices of those who fought in service of their country.

Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the VFW Auxiliary Department of New York on April 30, 2025 (Resolution No. 520, Barclay)

The VFW Auxiliary Department of New York was established on April 30, 1925, and has advocated for the rights of veterans ever since. VFW veteran service officers help veterans navigate the various benefits available on the federal, state, and local level. VFW also organizes several community events across the State. This resolution commemorates the VFW Auxiliary's 100th anniversary.

Commemorating New York State's Korean War Veterans (Resolution No. 607, Schiavoni)

During the Korean War approximately 1,789,000 members of the United States Armed Forces served in theater, including 482,000 New Yorkers. This resolution recognizes and honors New York's Korean War veterans.

Recognizing the 80th Anniversary of the End of World War II (Resolution No. 624, Stern)

On August 15, 1945, World War II came to an end after the surrender of the Japanese in the Pacific theater. During World War II approximately 16 million Americans served in the United States Armed Forces, including 900,000 New Yorkers. Over 437,000 Americans died valiantly to defend the values of freedom, liberty, and democracy. This resolution recognizes the 80th anniversary of World War II and honors the New Yorkers who fought and gave their lives in defense of their country.

Posthumously Honoring the Life and Service of United States Army Air Forces Staff Sergeant Eugene J. Darrigan (Resolution No. 715, Bephan)

On May 24, 2025, former United States Army Air Forces Staff Sergeant Eugene J. Darrigan was laid to rest more than eight decades after his passing. Darrigan, a resident of Wappingers Falls, served with great courage in World War II as a radio operator for the United States Army Air Forces. On March 11, 1944, Darrigan and ten other crew members of the B-24 Bomber "Heaven Can Wait" tragically lost their lives off the coast of New Guinea after receiving enemy fire. The remains of the "Heaven Can Wait" were lost for 81 years, until recovered in 2023. This resolution posthumously honors the life, service, and sacrifice of Eugene J. Darrigan.

Commemorating June 14, 2025, as Flag Day (Resolution No. 767, 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 as Flag Day. This resolution commemorates June 14, 2025, as Flag Day in New York.

Commemorating the 81st Anniversary of the Signing of the GI Bill of Rights (Resolution No. 797, Hyndman)

The GI Bill Act was signed into law by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on June 22, 1944, opening the door to higher education for millions of veterans. The GI Bill provided several benefits to veterans returning from World War II, including access to low-cost mortgages, low-interest business loans, and stipends to attend high school, college, and vocational school. As a direct result of the GI Bill, many returning veterans were able to find jobs, attend school, and purchase a home. This resolution commemorates the 81st anniversary of the signing of the GI Bill of Rights.

Commemorating the 77th Anniversary of the Signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act (Resolution No. 805, Hunter)

President Harry S. Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act into law on June 12, 1948, allowing women to serve in all branches of the United States Armed Services. In the nearly eight decades that have followed, women from across the United States have fought to preserve the American values of freedom, liberty, and democracy. This resolution commemorates the 77th anniversary of the signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act.

Commemorating the 81st Anniversary of the D-Day Invasion (Resolution No. 806, Eachus)

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 81st anniversary of one of the largest successful amphibious military assaults in history.

Commemorating Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day (Resolution No. 807, Pfeiffer Amato)

In the words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, December 7, 1941, is “a date that will live in infamy.” On this date, 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, 2025.

Commemorating November 11, 2025, as Veterans Day (Resolution No. 808, Berger)

Veterans Day is a national holiday celebrated annually on November 11th, to pay homage to the veterans of our military. This resolution honors all veterans who have fought and served for the United States, and commemorates November 11, 2025, as Veterans Day.

Commemorating the 105th Anniversary of the Naming of the Borinqueneers (Resolution No. 822, Ramos)

On June 4, 1920, the Puerto Rico Regiment of Infantry, the first body of native troops in Puerto Rico, was renamed the 65th Infantry. Later nicknamed the Borinqueneers, the 65th Infantry saw action in the European theater of World War II and the Korean War, where the Infantry played a significant role in several important offensives and counteroffensives. This resolution commemorates the 105th anniversary of the naming of the Borinqueneers and the service of those under the 65th Infantry.

Veteran-Related Events

Four Chaplains Day (Resolution No. 66, Eachus)

In World War II, four chaplains on board the sinking United States Army 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, 2025, as Four Chaplains Day.

K9 Veterans Day (Resolution No. 196, Santabarbara)

Military dogs have served in many 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 dog handler, later led a nationwide effort to have March 13th recognized as K9 Veterans Day. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim March 13, 2025, as K9 Veterans Day.

Medal of Honor Day (Resolution No. 251, O’Pharrow)

The Medal of Honor is the highest and most prestigious military decoration in the United States. The award is given to those who “have distinguished themselves conspicuously by their gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their lives above and beyond the call of duty.” This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim March 25, 2025, as Medal of Honor Day.

Vietnam Veterans’ Day (Resolution No. 261, Stern)

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 Hochul to proclaim March 29, 2025, as Vietnam Veterans’ Day.

Month of the Military Child (Resolution No. 279, Hunter)

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. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim April 2025 as the Month of the Military Child.

Yellow Ribbon Day (Resolution No. 293, Kay)

Yellow ribbons are symbols to show support for, and solidarity with, service members. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim April 9, 2025, as Yellow Ribbon Day.

Submarine Day (Resolution No. 319, 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, 2025, as Submarine Day.

West Point Day (Resolution No. 336, 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 Hochul to proclaim April 9, 2025, as West Point Day.

Pets For Veterans Day (Resolution No. 469, Manktelow)

National Pets for Veterans Day was created to recognize the therapy animals that provide comfort and support to their human companions. Therapy animals allow veterans to better handle conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim October 21, 2025, as Pets for Vets Day.

Armed Forces Day (Resolution No. 513, 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 Hochul to proclaim May 18, 2025, as Armed Forces Day.

Military Spouse Appreciation Day (Resolution No. 611, Hunter)

President Ronald Reagan recognized the importance of spousal commitment to the success of the United States Armed Services, and declared May 23, 1984, as the first Military Spouse Appreciation Day. Military spouses make immense personal sacrifices while also providing love and emotional support to members of the Armed Services. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim May 9, 2025, as Military Spouse Appreciation Day.

Military Appreciation Month (Resolution No. 618, Stern)

Memorial Day is a national holiday celebrated annually on May 26 to pay homage to those in the military who have given their life in service of the United States. However, it is felt that an official month-long period is needed to show appreciation to the sacrifices made by veterans. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim May 2025 as Military Appreciation Month.

Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month and Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day (Resolution No. 634, Lavine)

While accounts of psychological symptoms following traumatic events stretch back to ancient times, it has been shown through electro-magnetic imaging 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 Hochul to proclaim June 2025 as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month and June 27, 2025, as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day.

Women Veterans Recognition Day (Resolution No. 642, 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) Since then, generations of women from New York have served bravely in the Armed Forces and have made countless sacrifices in service of the United States. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim June 12, 2025, as Women Veterans Recognition Day in recognition of the contributions women veterans have made to the Armed Forces.

Veterans Awareness Week (Resolution No. 765, Stern)

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 Hochul to proclaim November 3-9, 2025, the week prior to national Veterans Day, as Veterans Awareness Week.

Gold Star Mothers and Families Day (Resolution No. 776, Stern)

A Gold Star family is the immediate family of a member of the United States Armed Services who died serving in a time of conflict. The Gold Star honors those who died in service of their country and signifies the pride the family has in the deceased servicemember. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim September 28, 2025, as Gold Star Mothers and Families Day.

Purple Heart Day (Resolution No. 785, Kay)

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, 2025, as Purple Heart Day.

Veterans Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day (Resolution No. 786, Stern)

Veterans’ Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day was established to recognize the life and death of Senior Airman Robert McRae Dean and every veteran and active-duty military member who has died by suicide. It is also a day to elevate the issue in the public consciousness and to focus on prevention efforts. The rate of suicide among veterans is 1.4 times higher among male veterans and 1.8 time higher among female veterans when compared to the general adult population. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim September 22, 2025, as Veterans Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day.

Day of the Deployed (Resolution No. 791, Buttenschon)

The Day of the Deployed is a day to honor deployed troops and their families for their bravery and sacrifices in service of the country. Members of the Armed Forces are called upon to be deployed on short notice to support, reassure, and defend allies and partners of the United States and to deter adversaries around the world. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim October 26, 2025, as the Day of the Deployed.

September 19, 2025, POW/MIA Day (Resolution No. 809, Burdick)

The first POW/MIA Recognition Day commemoration was held at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. As of 2025, there are approximately 73,515 people either classified as Missing in Action or as Prisoners of War. POW/MIA Day serves to honor the members of the Armed Forces who never returned. This resolution memorializes Governor Hochul to proclaim September 19, 2025, as POW/MIA Day.

VI. OTHER ACTIVITIES BY THE VETERANS' COMMITTEE

A. Hearings and Roundtables

On November 12th, the Committees on Veterans' Affairs and Mental Health, and the Subcommittee on Women Veterans held a hearing on increasing veteran access to mental health services.

The Rand Corporation's 2024 report "Understanding Veterans In New York: a Needs Assessment of Veterans Recently Separated from the Military," which analyzed responses from 1,122 New York veterans, found that many experience mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts; however, 21% of those surveyed said they are not receiving the mental health care they need. The report also noted that addressing mental health challenges in a manner reflective of the unique circumstances of military service proves difficult, with 39% of veterans saying they believe mental health treatment is ineffective. Lack of childcare and transportation, high treatment costs, and stigma were also cited as barriers by veterans in accessing necessary mental health care.

The purpose of this hearing was to examine ways to increase veterans' access to mental health services, including examining the role that existing resources like suicide prevention funding and peer support programs, such as the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program, can play in addressing these challenges. Among those who testified were the New York State Department of Veterans' Services, the New York State Office of Mental Health, the New York City Department of Veterans' Services, the Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency, the Dwyer Coalition for Military Veterans and Families, and the National Association of Social Workers.

B. Subcommittee on Women Veterans

On June 4, 2025, the Subcommittee on Women Veterans held "Women Veterans Recognition Day" in Albany. The event consisted of a keynote address by Lieutenant Colonel (Ret) Diane Greenpope, who served as a nurse and a civil affairs officer in several locations overseas during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, and was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

Participants included the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, (IVMF) Syracuse VA Medical Center, NYS Department of Veterans' Services, and the Military Women's Memorial. (D.C.) Activities included lunch, introduction of the women veterans in the Assembly Chamber, and passage of a legislative resolution memorializing Governor Hochul to proclaim June 12, 2025, as Women Veterans Recognition Day.

VII. OUTLOOK FOR 2026

The Committee is looking forward to a productive year in 2026 and will continue to work with the Department of Veterans' Services, 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;
- 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 across 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
2025 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)	4	0	4
To Ways & Means	12	0	12
To Codes	1	0	1
To Rules	6	0	6
To Judiciary	0	0	0
Total	23	0	23
<u>Bills Having Committee Reference Changed</u>			
To Ways and Means	1	0	1
Total	1	0	1
<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 REMAINING IN COMMITTEE	35	8	43
TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD		5	

APPENDIX B
BILLS THAT PASSED BOTH HOUSES

Assembly Bill #	Sponsor	Description	Final Action
A.291-A	Barrett	Relates to the definition of “veterans.”	Chapter 611
A.2058	Cunningham	Modifies the duties of the Women’s Veterans Coordinator and the information the Department of Health (DOH) is required to provide to maternal healthcare providers when implementing the Veteran Maternity Care Program.	Chapter 65
A.2435	Cruz	Modifies the Alex R. Jimenez NYS Military Immigrant Family Program.	Chapter 69
A.4649-A	Rajkumar	Requires DVS to forward a copy of a veteran’s certificate of release or discharge from active duty to the appropriate local veterans’ service agency in a timely manner.	Veto 104
A.4751-A	Rajkumar	Requires DVS to provide virtual links to Department of Civil Service employment programs and for DVS and local VSOs to include civil service provisions reserved for disabled veterans within their existing veteran employment assistance.	Chapter 490
A.5155	Stern	Requires DVS, in consultation with the DOH, to conduct a study on veterans’ healthcare.	Veto 67
A.6264	Stern	Expands the definition of “veteran” to include members of the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Public Health Service.	Chapter 612
A.6579	Stern	Authorizes municipalities, at local option, to grant a real property tax exemption of up to 25 percent of the real property value to active service members who serve in a combat zone.	Chapter 677
A.8475	Berger	Replaces outdated references to “director” with “commissioner” in various sections of law.	Chapter 537
A.8476	Stern	Enacts the “Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act,” to impose additional penalties on individuals who solicit, or charge fees related to veterans’ benefits advising in violation of state or federal law.	Chapter 491
A.8485	Stern	Requires DVS to provide information on the Department’s website related to volunteer postings with municipal emergency medical service providers and volunteer fire departments.	Chapter 666

APPENDIX C
COMMITTEE BILLS THAT PASSED THE ASSEMBLY ONLY

Assembly Bill #	Sponsor	Description
A.6538	Schiavoni	Would amend various sections of law to change references to the “Division of Veterans’ Services” to the “Department of Veterans’ Services.”
A.6559-B	Benedetto	Would require DVS to establish, publish, and distribute a Veterans’ Bill of Rights.
A.7627-A	Kay	Would require DVS to disseminate educational resources to veterans regarding the availability and accessibility of home and community services.
A.8087	Stern	Would authorize the issuance of a “New York State Cold War Commemorative Medal.”
A.8089	Dais	Would require DVS to annually compile and publish an annotated compilation of all state statutes governing the rights, services, and privileges afforded to servicemembers, veterans, and their families.