



THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK

2016-17 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

*John Sampson, Department Commander
Harvey J. McCagg, Legislative Chair
William T. Mahan, Vice Chair*

Status as of February 17, 2017

Nearly 100 years ago, veterans of the “war to end all wars” united to create an organization to care for their former comrades and their families, and to perpetuate Americanism, promoting the ideas of freedom and democracy that represents the fabric of our Nation.

At the 98th annual convention in Binghamton July 14-16, 2016, The American Legion, Department of New York, reaffirmed the organization’s principles and a commitment to its leadership in providing advocacy and help to veterans of our nation’s military, their families and dependents, and members of America’s Armed Forces.

The more than 200,000 members of the New York Department Family offer valuable support to our veterans’ community through its network of local posts, neighbor-to-neighbor help and an elite professional counseling service.

Resolutions historically have been the keystone of the annual legislative agenda for The American Legion, Department of New York, and the 2016 convention again proved the diligence and talent of members to develop meaningful and timely proposals to present to elected state representatives for consideration as potential legislation.

This year’s agenda includes new proposals – and a few previously offered through resolution – that legionnaires believe will provide vital help to returning service members and improve the quality of life for our veterans and their families.

During the coming year, our Department of New York will champion these resolutions and proposals -- respectfully and affirmatively seeking support from our state legislators – reminding them of why and for whom we want specific legislation enacted.

Countless numbers of veterans come home physically and emotionally scarred by the horrors of war. Issues confronting our newest generation of veterans often are immediate, and literally a matter of life or death.

Today’s returning warriors are battling homelessness, suicide and need for suitable employment. The Department of New York American Legion recognizes these concerns and calls upon our New York State Legislature and Governor to join us in reaching out and helping our veterans’ community by enacting legislation or policies designed to meet those needs.

Resolution #25, 2016; Requests the Governor and New York State Legislature to pursue, identify and recommend viable, alternative treatments to assist war-time veterans in assuming their rightful role as leaders and contributing citizens of The Empire State.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) are the defined injuries for veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and are routinely treated by Department of Defense (DO) and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) through a regiment of mental health care and medication, which for too many, is ineffective.

The devastation of PTSD and TBI demands a dedicated and comprehensive study to delineate viable treatments such as animal therapy, hyperbaric oxygen treatment (HBOT) and various other courses of action that have demonstrated beneficial results.

The resolution – reiterating a 2014 Department proposal – mirrors a position developed and offered by the National American Legion and presented to Congress.

(Priority Legislation)

Resolution #30, 2016; Calls for coordination of an open flow of information across state agencies, regulatory authorities and education institutions that would remove barriers and accelerate pathways to civilian occupations for former military personnel, ensuring recognition and acceptance of military licenses and credentials achieved in service.

Many veterans, looking to establish careers and families in New York State after leaving the military, find they must go through a lengthy and often costly formal state administrative process to secure licenses and certificates for professions and skills they performed admirably while on active duty.

Transferring valuable and unique career experiences, such as emergency medical technician/paramedic, licensed practical and registered nursing, physical therapy assistant, bus and truck driver and police patrol officer (are just a few) should not have barriers delaying or preventing veterans from moving licensure for a compatible civilian work position.

(Priority Legislation)

Resolution #31, 2016; Calls for state legislation to prevent private housing associations from prohibiting home owners/residents from displaying an American flag – prohibitions that are an affront to many men and women who selflessly served and often sacrificed greatly under the banner of our Nation.

(Priority Legislation)

Resolution #32, 2014 Calls for establishing State Veterans Cemeteries in communities that successfully complete all legal prerequisites in New York. Such cemeteries would provide for the proper and respectful internment of veterans in areas not adequately served by national or local veteran's cemeteries. **Senator Schumer announced \$36 million in Federal Funding has been included in the President's Fiscal Year 2017 Budget.**

BOYS STATE: American Legion Boys’ State is a unique program that teaches high school juniors leadership, citizenship training, and individual responsibility, while offering a perspective of the practical operation of government.

Previously New York State has authorized a \$150,000 grant to offset overall costs of the program in which 1,000 boys annually participate at SUNY Morrisville.

Continuation of the grant is urged to ensure financial well-being of the program, while maintaining an important educational opportunity for our state’s young men. **(Priority Legislation and or Funding) - 04/08/16 – Senator Croci obtained the Funds - \$150,000**

VETERANS’ DEFENSE PROGRAM (VDP): The Veterans Defense Program was created several years ago to assist veterans in the criminal justice system, who also struggled with untreated service-related mental health issues.

It is the first in the nation and has assisted New York veterans in more than 100 criminal justice and family court systems, while training hundreds of lawyers defending veterans.

The VDP received \$500,000 in the 2015 State Budget to operate its program and is seeking a total of \$1.1 million in the 2016-2017 budget. The American Legion supports the increase in funding for this worthy program. **(Priority Legislation and or Funding) – However, the same amount \$500,000 was budgeted again.**

Resolution #7, 2014: Request creation of a New York State World War I Centennial Commission to ensure a suitable observance of the “war to end all wars,” and to provide for the designation of memorials to those members of the United States Armed Forces who served in that war. Fiscal impact should be minimal. A9524 DenDekker – 06/14/16 – Substituted by s685A – S6856 Martins 06/14/16 – Substituted for a9529, Ordered to Third Reading Rules Cal. 183, **Passed Assembly & Returned to the Senate – A Memorandum of Support was Issued on 06/07/16. Delivered to the Governor 11/16/16 – Signed 11/28/16 Chap. 486**

Resolution #10, 2014: Suicide is epidemic among our veterans. The American Legion urges Congress and the President to sign into law the Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, or similar acts, that will expand and improve care provided for veterans and service members with mental health issues, or who are at risk for suicide. We also urge the New York State Legislature and state agencies to keep funding and supporting programs and groups that reach out to men and women in uniform, veterans and their families through family care programs, suicide prevention programs, job fairs, and public service announcements, bringing about awareness of PTSD and suicide prevention.



LEGISLATION SUPPORTED IN 2016

The following legislation introduced during the 2015 and/or 2016 Legislative Session is currently under consideration by legislators. The American Legion remains behind these proposals and urges support and adoption of these proposals.

*(NOTE: 2017 Bill #'s Identified with an *)*

PERFORMANCE OF A STUDY REGARDING HOMELESS VETERANS IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK – 01/30/17 – Rozic – Reintroduced Bill - # Pending

Would require a study be conducted by the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, the Office of Temporary Disability Service, Department of Labor and the Office of Children and Family Services to determine the number of homeless persons in New York State who are veterans. It will also determine the number of offspring of the veterans and current placement, and whether such veterans suffered military sexual trauma.

A434 – Rozic – 06/09/16 – Passed Assembly, Delivered to Senate, Reported to Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs, Recalled from Senate, Returned to Assembly to Third Reading & Amended On Third Reading 434c - S2575 – Parker 06/10/16 – Amend & Recommit to Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs – Print # 2575C

RELATES TO USE OF PERSONAL CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM VETERANS OR FAMILY MEMBERS OF VETERANS RECEIVING SERVICES FROM THE STATE

Requires all subdivisions of the state to, when dealing with a client or customer, inquire as to whether or not he/she or a family member is a veteran, and, if so, notify them of the tremendous additional resource available in the Division of Veterans Affairs (NYSDVA).

A5514 Cusick – 03/16/16 – Passed Assembly, Delivered to the Senate & Referred to Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs – S3599 - Parker 01/25/17 – Referred to Veterans, & Homeland Security & Military Affairs*

