



## Division of Veterans' Services

### Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Testimony

#### New York State Division of Veterans' Services

Good morning Chairs Krueger and Weinstein and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly. My name is Colonel (U.S. Army, Ret.) Jim McDonough, and I am the Director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services, or *NYS DVS*.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Governor Cuomo's 2020-2021 Executive Budget as it relates to New York State Veterans' Services.

The core mission of the Division of Veterans' Services is to connect veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and their families and dependents to various economic, medical, and societal benefits, programs, and services available to them due to their active duty military service. As an agency entering its 75<sup>th</sup> year of service to New York State, DVS's professional benefits advising staff prepares, presents, and processes applications for United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compensation and pension awards, education benefits, burial benefits, vocational rehabilitation training, health care, nursing home care, real property tax exemptions, and other resources, services, and care, on behalf of individual veterans and their families.

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York remains a state where veterans and their families are proud to call home. And with the additional support of the State Legislature we can continue providing the best possible care and assistance for those who have served our country. The Agency's economic impact, delivered directly to New York's veteran families, yields incredible results annually, with over \$750 million in tax-free federal dollars for thousands of New York's veterans filtering into every community across New York State due to our agency's actions alone. These efforts have a real and measurable impact on improving the quality of life and access to care for veterans and their families.

This year, under Governor Cuomo's leadership, the Division strengthened its relationship with our partners in County Veterans' Service Agencies through improvements being made in training, technology, and tools by which to best serve our clients. Importantly, the Division is overhauling its training programs to be more inclusive of County Veterans' Service Agencies by offering them access to all training and education endeavors. Our strategy is simple: what we provide for our own team, we will ultimately provide to the counties, and at no additional expense to them.

It is with this same commitment to bettering the lives of New York's veterans and their families that this year's Executive Budget includes initiatives which will additionally

address their mental health, housing and educational needs. The Governor's budget also seeks to establish further, dignified burial options for New York's veteran families by establishing the state's first veterans' cemetery. The proposed Budget also supports investments of:

- \$5 million to expand permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans through the state's Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP); and
- \$1 million to partner with organizations to help veterans, law enforcement, and first responders with suicide prevention efforts.

We are grateful for the continued support of Governor Cuomo and his administration in further investing in the needs facing our veteran families. We are committed to working with our partners at New York State Homes and Community Renewal and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to support housing New York's veterans and to apply these additional resources best. We will also utilize other funds such as the Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund to address additional societal needs of New York's veteran families.

As the State agency of record charged with assisting them, we maintain a very robust and outwardly-facing stance, with easy-to-access offices in every major VA Medical Center in New York State, coupled with an increasing presence in VA Vet Centers and Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC's).

Combined, our agency's efforts will continue to provide the best quality service to New York's veterans, service members and their families for the next 75 years and beyond. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Governor's Executive Budget to the committee and on behalf of New York's veteran families, thank you for your continued support of the agency's mission. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.