

Testimony of the NYS Council of Veterans Organizations
Before the
New York State Legislature's Joint Budget
Committee Hearings on Human Services
January 24, 2019

Good morning esteemed Chairs and members of the Human Services Budget Subcommittee. I am **Kirby Hannan, speaking today in behalf of the NYS Veterans Council, or the Vets Council as we call it.** I would like to thank you for the opportunity to bring priority veterans budget issues identified by the Council before you for consideration.

The Vets Council consists of more than 25 Veteran Service Organizations, meeting monthly to discuss key issues of importance to veterans. With me today are fellow veterans and members of the Council, Linda McKinnis, Disabled American Veterans Legislative representative, and Art Cody, Veterans Defense Program.

Our purpose today is to apprise this committee of our budget goals for 2019 and to thank you for the highly interactive hearing you conducted last year. My associates will go to the details of why we are grateful, but suffice it to say, that we testified last year and you listened. Money was appropriated or redirected to critical programs benefiting New York veterans: **Veteran Service Officer funding, Peer to Peer Mentoring, Veterans Defense Program and money for mentoring within the Office of Court Administration for Veterans' Treatment Courts.**

Today we have a cadre of Veteran Service Officers, employed by Vet Service Organizations like the VFW. There are approximately a dozen such VSOs state wide that are active and that is not nearly enough! I will tell you why. The VFW's VSO in our Buffalo Office alone, accounts for more than 2 million dollars per month of Federal benefits for New York Veterans. The VSO's are bringing money into New York State, keeping our soldiers here, and are a worthy investment that can stand any test of return on investment. The Veterans Council and the VFW are asking that the legislature to continue to fund \$125,000 to the VFW for our two service officers and to add an appropriation of \$500,000 so that other congressionally recognized Veteran Service Organizations can apply for similar grants utilizing the grants gateway to create a statewide network. Currently we are in need of coverage on Long Island, Hudson Valley, and Southern Tier.

Before we go to Linda McKinnis on how peer to peer works, I must mention a change in the electronic version sent to the Chairs two days ago. The Governor in his budget message proposed funding for the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer to Peer program to be taken to all counties. Prior budget cycles funded it for 23 upstate counties at a cost of three and a half million dollars. **Unfortunately he did not put an appropriation in when the budget numbers were released by LRS yesterday. We are asking the legislature to expand the program to all counties and fund it at a ten million dollar level.**