



New York State Council of Veterans' Organizations

TO: Joint NYS Legislative Budget Committee on Mental Hygiene
From: NYS Council of Veterans' Organizations (NYSCOVO)
Date: February 13, 2024
Re: Budget Requests

Please accept the following budget requests from NYSCOVO, a 501 (c) 3 corporation that represents the interests of 27 diverse veteran organizations.

JOSEPH P. DWYER VETERAN PEER TO PEER SERVICES PROGRAM

Attached is testimony and a chart submitted by the Facilitator of the NYS Dwyer Coalition, Gavin T. Walters, Sr., during the Legislative Budget Hearing for Human Services. The testimony provides a brief description of many of the services provided under the Dwyer Program and the chart provides a county-by-county breakdown if funding were to be increased by 27.5%, which approximates the rate of inflation from the program's inception in 2012 to 2023.

The Dwyer Program was instituted in 2012 with four New York counties that were each awarded \$185,000 to promote peer-to-peer counseling among veterans for the treatment of PTSD and other mental health disorders. The program was extended to eleven counties in 2015, and there were 23 counties participating when Governor Hochul extended the program to all 62 counties in 2022. The 2022 legislation retained the \$185,000 maximum award for the then participating counties and provided New York City with an award of \$400,000, 30 additional counties with awards of either \$100,000 or \$105,000, one county with an award of \$80,000, and four counties with awards of \$52,000. All 62 counties received a 4.5% cost of living increase under the current Executive budget proposal.

Current needs of the Dwyer Program cannot be measured solely by the rate of inflation. The program has morphed from providing programs that merely sought to encourage veterans to seek treatment for PTSD and other mental health disorders to programs that actually deal with the treatment of these disorders by providing funds for such issues as transportation needs, food insecurity, and homelessness. Mr. Walters' request for funding is essential if the current needs of the Dwyer Program are to be met.

WOMEN VETERANS

A lot has been said in recent years about meeting the needs of women veterans but little has been done. In essence, women veterans are pretty much in the same place that their male counterparts were when the Dwyer Program was instituted in 2012. They need peer-to-peer support, but there is no mechanism in place to provide for it. In 2012, male veterans were encouraged to gather at VFW posts and other veteran owned facilities where they would form bonds that would lead to peer-to-peer support. Quite frankly, these types of settings do not hold the same attraction for most female veterans.

NYSCOVO recommends that funds be made available for the purpose of promoting regional events and other activities that encourage participation by women veterans and that the Dwyer Program be the repository for these funds. It is further suggested that the funds not be distributed on a county-by-county basis so as to encourage broader participation in these events. The Dwyer Program is the most logical choice to coordinate these events because it has sponsored hundreds of similar events over the past twelve years. It is suggested that \$200,000 would be an adequate amount to jumpstart this project.

PEER-TO-PEER TRAINING

It is noted that the Executive proposal contains a \$2,000,000 allocation for “services and expenses of organizations related to suicide prevention, peer to peer training and other mental supports and services for veterans and first responders, including disaster relief workers.” (S.8033.A.8803; page 861, ln 30). This provision will help to defray the costs incurred by the VFW and other organizations to get their members in the door to receive peer-to-peer training. Unfortunately, there are few, if any, suitable training programs that are directed at veterans who wish to engage in peer-to-peer counseling once they get through the door. For this reason, NYSCOVO requests that the Department of Mental Hygiene be directed to formulate a training program, preferably in the form of a webinar, that provides veterans with the knowledge necessary to counsel their fellow veterans who are experiencing PTSD and other mental health disorders. It would be best for the legislature to require the Department of Mental Hygiene to provide a dollar figure for this project.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

For further information, please contact:
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2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Human Services

Thank you, Senate, and Assemblymembers for allowing me to sit here and represent our military community. I have the great privilege of sitting here as the facilitator for the NY State Dwyer Coalition which houses PFC. Joseph P Dwyer Peer Support Projects across the state. In addition, I have the honor of facilitating the Ulster County Dwyer Program aka Vet2Vet of Ulster County which is under the Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran Reintegration.

We can look back and see that 2022 was a tremendous year for the PFC Joseph P Dwyer Peer Projects. The expansion has allowed every Veteran and their family to be connected to resources and services across the state. The Dwyer Projects has allowed service members to feel equally represented because time, discharge status, and length of service do not matter when you connect to a Dwyer Project. If you're homeless, some Dwyer Projects can help pay for a day or two at a hotel. If a Veteran enjoys hiking, a Dwyer Project can assist with getting an individual outdoors. Equine Encounters, Mindfulness, and groups help continue the camaraderie that we experience in service. These attributes represent the Dwyer Counties and that is what was brought to every county in NY State.

The NY State Dwyer Coalition remains mission-focused to keep the camaraderie among the Dwyer Programs. This involves having a single unified platform that creates an ongoing dialogue that addresses the military community's needs and their families. Some needs include increased funding. Increased funds would empower the Dwyer Project to intensify its engagement with Veterans and their families.

The importance of increasing funds to the Dwyer Project becomes evident in the multifaceted impact it has on the veteran community. Enhanced financial support translates into more resources for local programs, enabling them to expand their reach and depth of services. These funds are the lifeblood that sustains monthly meetings, ensuring that the project remains a dynamic force for positive change.

Moreover, additional funds enable the Dwyer Project to innovate and implement new strategies in veteran support. Whether through the introduction of specialized programs, outreach initiatives, or enhanced training for peer support volunteers, increased financial support provides the flexibility needed to adapt to emerging challenges and pioneer effective solutions.

In conclusion, the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Project stands as a testament to the impact that collaborative efforts and advocacy can have on the lives of Veterans. The importance of increasing funds for this project cannot be overstated. It is an investment in the well-being of those who have sacrificed for our country, a commitment to creating a supportive community that understands the complexities of military service.

With enhanced financial support, the Dwyer Project can continue to be a powerful force for positive change. It ensures that group meetings remain vibrant, that engagements with Veterans and their families, and that the network of peer support programs thrives. The funds are not just numbers on a balance sheet; they represent a tangible commitment to the mental health and

resilience of New York's Veterans, fostering a community where the echoes of support reach every corner of the state.

Thank you for your time.

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US Inflation Calculator: <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>

Current funding: \$7.715 Million

Proposed increase by the rate of inflation: \$2,121,625 Million

Current Funding + Inflation Total Amount: \$9,836,625 Million

Counties	Funding	Rate of Inflation is 27.5% (from 2012- 2023)
Albany	\$105,000	\$133,875(+\$28,875)
Allegany	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Broome	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Cattaraugus	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Cayuga	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Chautauqua	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Chemung	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Chenango	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Clinton	\$52,500	\$66,675(+\$14,175)
Columbia	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Cortland	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Delaware	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Dutchess	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Erie	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Essex	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Franklin	\$52,500	\$66,675(+\$14,175)
Fulton	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)



Genesee	\$80,000	\$102,000(+22,000)
Greene	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Hamilton	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Herkimer	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Jefferson	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Lewis	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Livingston	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Madison	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Monroe	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Montgomery	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Nassau	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Niagara	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Oneida	\$105,000	\$133,875(+28,875)
Onondaga	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Ontario	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Orange	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Orleans	\$52,000	\$66,675(+14,175)
Oswego	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Otsego	\$100,000	\$127,500(+27,500)
Putnam	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Rensselaer	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)
Rockland	\$185,000	\$235,875(+50,875)



Saratoga	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Schenectady	\$105,000	\$133,875(+\$28,875)
Schoharie	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Schuyler	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Seneca	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
St. Lawrence	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Steuben	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Suffolk	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Sullivan	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Tioga	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Tompkins	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Ulster	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Warren/Washington	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Wayne	\$100,000	\$127,500(+\$27,500)
Westchester	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
Wyoming	\$52,000	\$66,675(+\$14,175)
Yates	\$185,000	\$235,875(+\$50,875)
University of Albany	\$210,000	\$267,750(+\$57,750)
NYC (Bronx,	\$400,000	\$510,000(+\$110,000)
Brooklyn, Queens,		
Staten Island, Manhattan)		