



**Division of
Veterans' Affairs**

**2017 Annual Report
New York State
Division of
Veterans' Affairs**

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ABOUT THE DIVISION

The New York State Executive Department created the Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) in 1945, tasking the Division with assisting returning World War II Servicemembers re-adjust from military to civilian life. This objective soon expanded to encompass New York State's Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families from all eras. For 70 years, the Division has connected generations of Veterans, members of the armed forces, and their families and dependents to various economic, medical, and social benefits and services earned as the result of military service.

MISSION

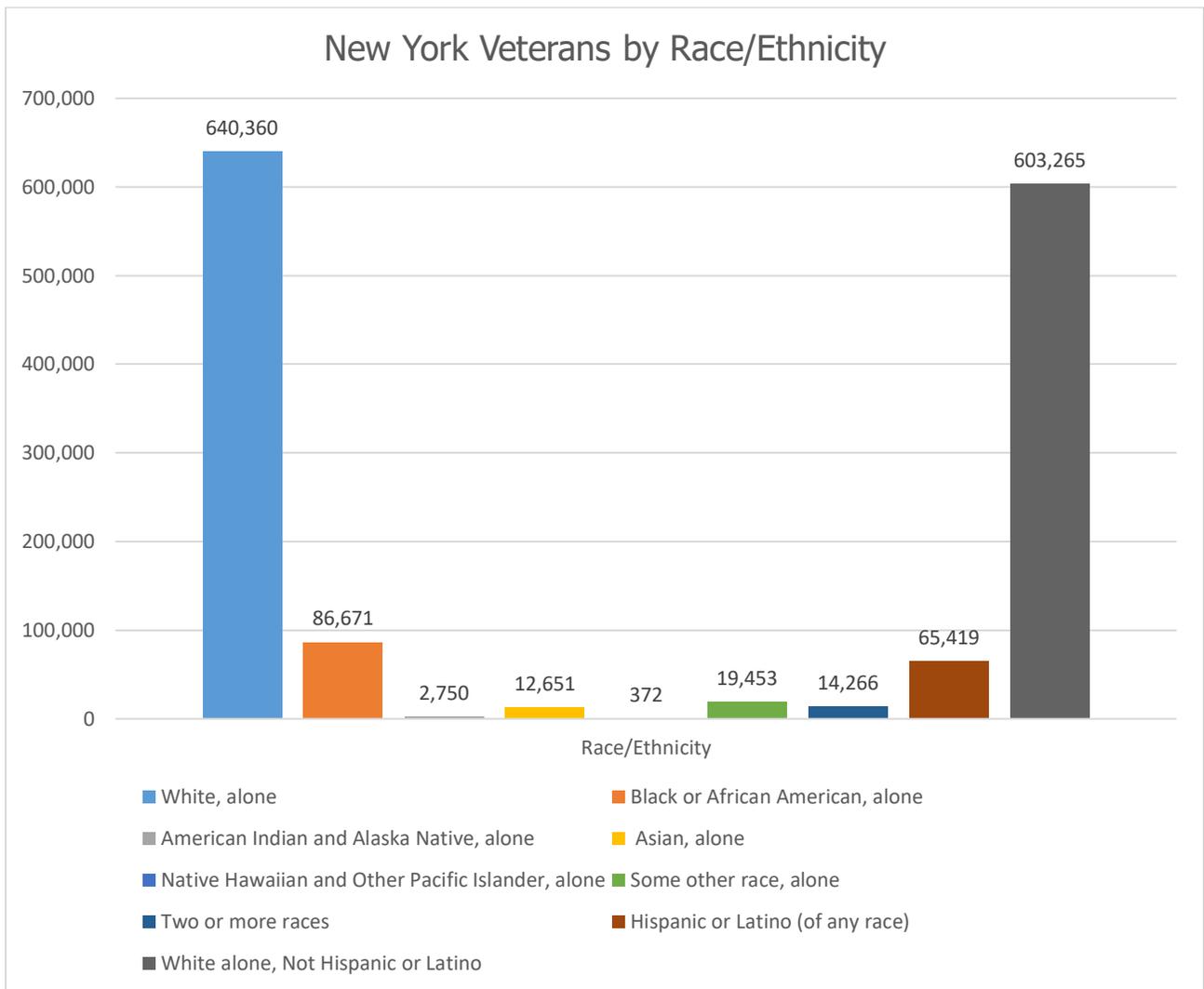
The Division assists New York's Veterans and their families the rest of the way. At all times, we provide quality support, advice, and advocacy for New York State's Veterans, Servicemembers, and their family members, helping them obtain State and Federal benefits earned by their service to New York State and to the United States of America.



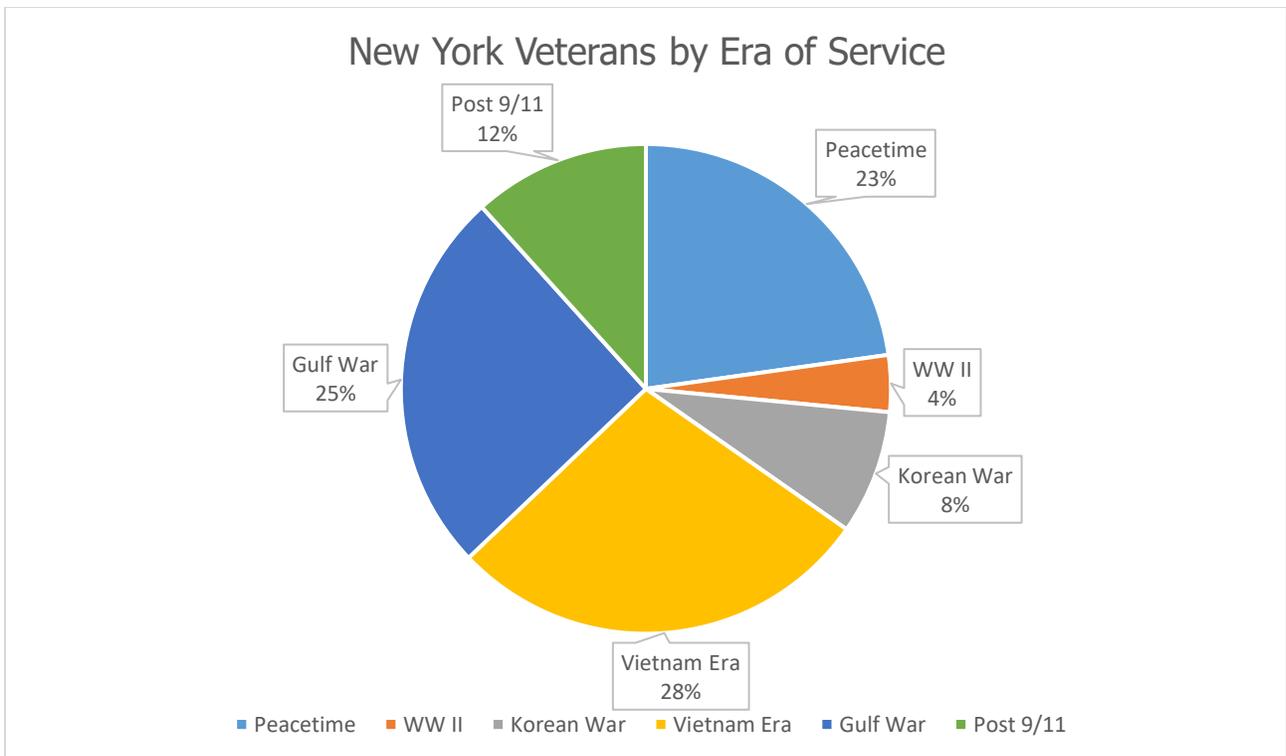
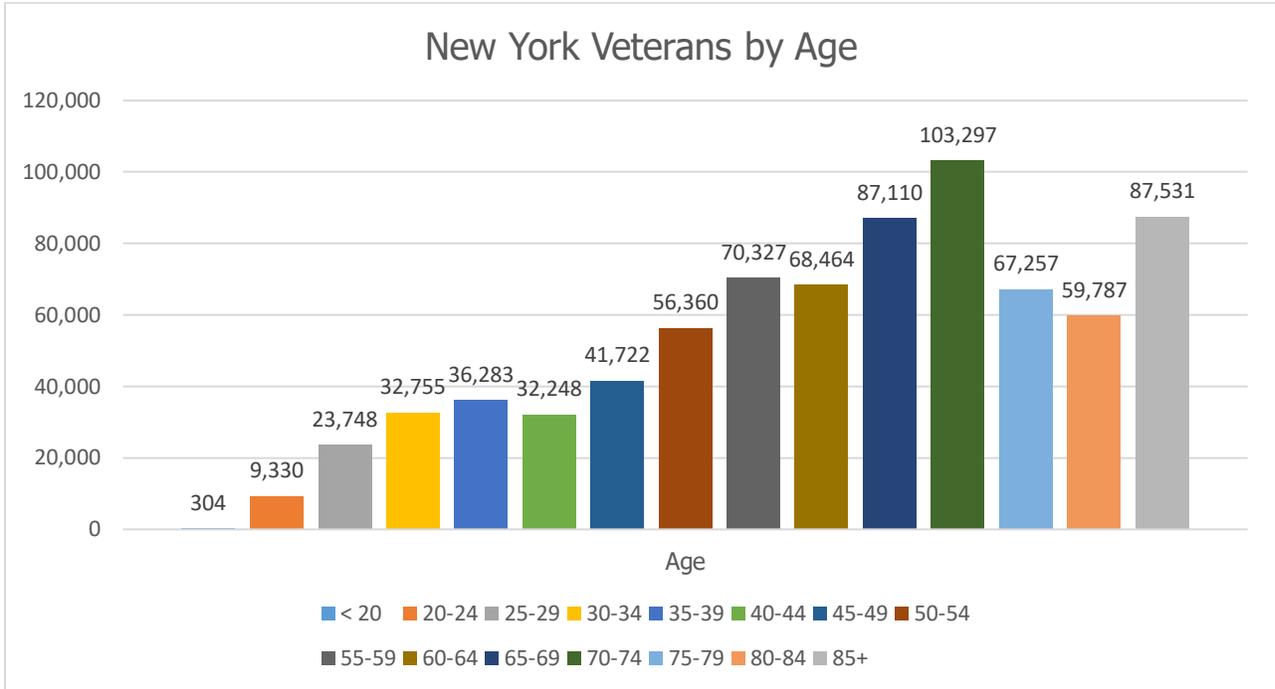
NEW YORK VETERANS SNAPSHOT¹

NEW YORK STATE'S VETERAN POPULATION IN 2017: 776,522

New York State Veteran Demographics



¹ All data reported as of September 30, 2017





By the Numbers: Serving Veterans and Their Families in 2017

Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Offices: 46

VA-Accredited DVA Employees: 63

Money Awarded in Claims Filed by DVA Advisors: \$151,842,701²

State Blind Annuity Recipients (Veterans): 2,045

State Blind Annuity Recipients (Surviving Spouses): 1,743

Total Blind Annuity Payments: 3,788

Total Gold Star Parent Annuity Payments: \$81,250

New York Residents Using G.I. Bill Education Benefits: 33,000³

G.I. Bill Approved Educational Programs in New York: 1,200

Money that G.I. Bill-Approved Programs Brought Into New York:

\$593,736,000

Residents of State Veterans Nursing Homes: 971

Percentage of Beds Filled in State Veterans Nursing Homes: 90.5%⁴

Number of Claims Filed by DVA at State Veterans Nursing Homes: 228

Total Licenses with Veteran Notation in 2017: 36,000

Total Licenses with Veteran Notation Issued: 96,173

Businesses Certified as Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses: 415

Veterans Currently Listed in the State's Veterans Temporary Hiring Portal:

1261

Veterans Currently Listed in the State's "55-c Program" Hiring Portal: 124

Veterans with Disabilities Issued State Parks Lifetime Liberty Passes in 2017:

2,392

Total Number of Veterans Issued Lifetime Liberty Passes: 9,329

² As of December 28, 2017

³ As of 2016

⁴ Average amount as of December 31, 2017



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New York State School Districts Offering Veterans School Tax Exemption:

202,704

Recipients of New York State's Veterans Real Property Tax Exemptions:

549,215



Division of Veterans' Affairs Highlights in 2017

I. Direct Agency Services to Veterans and their Family Members

Veterans Benefits Advisors Assisting Veterans and their Families

The largest single program in the Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) is the Veterans Benefits Advising Program. The agency's Veterans Benefits Advisors, all of whom are Veterans accredited by the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), secure and maintain a substantial portion of the federal VA benefits paid annually to Veterans and their dependents in New York State. Veterans Benefits Advisors currently staff 68 field offices located throughout every region of New York.

In 2017, Veterans Benefits Advisors generated over \$150,000,000 in new and recurring VA benefits payments for Veterans and their dependents. Data indicates that DVA continues to file more Fully Developed Claims than other Veterans Service Organizations in New York State, significantly reducing the VA's processing time and the waiting period before the claimant starts receiving benefits.

Additionally, DVA's Veterans Benefits Advisors help Veterans access the VA's network of health care, State Veterans' Homes, and nursing homes, as well as many local public assistance programs and private venues offering initiatives to assist Veterans and their families. This provides a significant financial savings for many Veterans and their families across the State. For example, 971 Veterans currently live in New York State's Veterans' Homes. These individuals would pay significantly more if they were receiving skilled nursing care in private facilities.



Veterans Education Program

The Veterans' Education Program staff, stationed at office locations in Albany and New York City, investigates and approves post-secondary educational and vocational institutions as providing a legitimate and quality education. This federally mandated approval process enables Veterans and their dependents to use VA educational benefits at scholastic institutions and facilities throughout New York.

There are approximately 1,200 approved educational programs in New York State, with around 33,000 Veterans presently utilizing these educational opportunities. These programs currently bring approximately \$593,000,000 into New York State.

Gold Star Parent Annuity Program

New York's Gold Star Parents — mothers and fathers of Servicemembers killed in action, as defined by federal law — are eligible to receive a \$500 annuity payment from the State. DVA evaluates eligibility for all Gold Star Parent Annuity applicants. While no amount of money can ever replace the loss of a child in combat, New York provides this annuity in honor of the deceased Servicemember and his or her family, and in recognition of their tremendous sacrifice. All Gold Star Parents residing and domiciled in New York State are eligible for this annuity, regardless of their household income.

In 2017, New York State paid a total of \$81,250 to Gold Star Parent Annuitants. As of December 2017, a total of approximately 162 New York Gold Star Parents receive this annuity from the State in bi-annual installments.



Blind Annuity Program

New York State provides an annuity for legally blind wartime Veterans, and un-remarried surviving spouses of legally blind wartime Veterans, who reside and are domiciled within New York State. Blindness need not be a service-connected disability to qualify. DVA evaluates eligibility for all Blind Annuity applicants.

New York State paid a total of \$5,323,771.35 to Blind Annuity Program recipients in 2017. As of December 2017, a total of 3,788 New Yorkers receives this annuity.

Each year, the Blind Annuity dollar amount is eligible to change due to cost of living increases. In 2018, the amount will increase to \$116.28 per month (grand total of \$1,395.36 for the entire year) for each recipient.

Supplemental Burial Allowance

New York State's Supplemental Burial Allowance helps defray funeral and interment costs for Servicemembers dying inside a combat zone or from wounds sustained in combat. This program reimburses family members for up to \$6,000 in documented funeral and interment expenses not covered by federal benefits.



II. New Statewide Initiatives and Programs for Veterans and their Families

Assisting Veterans Who are Incarcerated

DVA initiated several efforts during 2017 to enhance access to services for Veterans who are incarcerated. For the first time in the agency's history, DVA established a regular presence at all the New York State prisons that maintain Veterans-specific housing units. Working in close collaboration with the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, DVA set up monthly visits where accredited staff members meet one-on-one with Veterans inside these prisons and assist these Veterans with the full spectrum of Veterans benefits for which they are eligible.

Thus, far, each monthly visit to a correctional facility has led to an average of 7 one-on-one meetings with Veterans. Most these meetings have led to the filing of at least one claim or appeal for VA disability compensation, apportionment of VA benefits, debt waivers for alleged overpayments of federal benefits, discharge upgrades, and other benefits and services. These monthly visits fill a significant void in these Veterans' lives, as these correctional facilities were using outdated forms and inaccurate information about these VA benefits prior to DVA's increased involvement in this area.

DVA also worked with the New York State Department of Labor, the United States Department of Labor, and the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to enhance assistance for Veterans who are nearing the conclusion of their scheduled prison terms. By sharing information with soon-to-be-released Veterans, these partner agencies will be able to help these Veterans better re-integrate to their post-prison life, including assisting these Veterans with employment opportunities and ensuring that they receive the full complement of Veterans' benefits that they have earned.



DVA will continue collaborating with the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to increase services for Veterans who are incarcerated during 2018. DVA plans to expand its monthly visits to other correctional facilities that house a large population of Veterans, such as Attica Correctional Facility and Wyoming Correctional Facility. DVA will also be a featured presenter at the upcoming Department of Corrections and Community Services Training Academy, working with corrections officers from across the state in providing better services for Veterans in correctional facilities.



Enhancing Features on the New York State Veterans App

The "New York State Veterans App" provides an important medium for delivering up-to-the-minute information and access to services for Veterans and their family members throughout New York State. It is a vital tool in the agency's toolbox for the digital campaign to reach out to Veterans.

Only a handful of state governments currently offer a Veterans-specific app, and New York's app offers certain attributes that are unique in the nation. In recognition of this, the app received the award for Best Mobile/Wireless Project in 2016 by the Center for Digital Government.

The app now incorporates geo-fencing, or the ability to create a digital boundary, alerts can be sent to people regarding events and resources within a specific region. Additionally, the push notifications will now also provide interactive links that users can simply tap and be directed to the proper websites containing information about updates in healthcare, housing, education, employment claims and benefits. This system permits Veterans and their family members to instantly discover new developments regarding the resources applicable to them and their loved ones.

Given that the rules and regulations regarding Veterans' benefits, programs, and services change frequently, this feature will provide a much-needed and often-requested aid for Veterans and their families. Each notification includes the option for the reader to easily share this notification with others via email, text, Facebook, and Twitter.



Expanding Partnerships between DVA and Legal Services Organizations

For several decades, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and several Veterans Service Organizations prevented lawyers from representing Veterans and their families in VA claims and appeals. Today, attorneys may represent Veterans and their families in these cases, but a deeply-rooted suspicion continues to exist between lawyers, the VA, and Veterans Service Organizations.

DVA continues to make a concerted effort to eliminate these damaging and unnecessary barriers. This year, DVA worked in tandem with more legal service organizations than ever before, engaging in collaborative projects with Mobilization For Justice, Inc.; Prisoners' Legal Services of New York; Legal Services of the Hudson Valley; Disability Rights New York; Legal Services of New York City; Urban Justice Center; the New York Legal Assistance Group; the New York State Bar Association's Committee On Veterans; the New York City Bar Association's Veterans Assistance Project; and Angels For Warriors of Long Island.

One of the collaborative highlights of the year was working with Mobilization For Justice, Inc., to establish the first Veterans-specific initiative in the fifty-year history of this highly regarded not-for-profit legal services organization. Another keystone accomplishment was connecting leaders at Disability Rights New York with leaders at United States Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and Vet Centers in Albany and New York City, providing Veterans in these facilities with a great resource for free legal help with reasonable accommodations and other disability-based areas of assistance.

Most importantly of all, these new and continuing partnerships led to a robust climate of cross-referrals between DVA and these various legal assistance groups. These cross-referrals allowed Veterans and their families to receive comprehensive free assistance with matters ranging from public housing challenges to bankruptcy proceedings to



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family law matters to improper denials of Social Security benefits and VA services. The success of these referrals among this web of like-minded organizations demonstrates the necessity of continuing to maintain and augment these vital partnerships for the future.



Growing Access to Veterans Treatment Courts

As part of DVA's ongoing efforts to protect the rights of Veterans in the criminal justice system, DVA served on the planning committee of New York's first-ever "Enhancing Court Services for Veterans Initiative." Led by the Center for Court Innovation and the New York State Office of Court Administration, this new program focused on improving the cultural competency of judges, court coordinators, and other judicial system professionals who encounter Veterans and Servicemembers in their courtrooms.

With significant contributions from DVA, this planning committee formed a detailed resource guide of federal, state, and local programs and services available to Veterans and Servicemembers. This guide was distributed to judges and other court personnel across New York State. Simultaneously, the committee developed a training program to teach court professionals how to identify Veterans and Servicemembers in their courtrooms, understand the unique backgrounds of Veterans and Servicemembers, and connect them with appropriate services to improve Veterans' and Servicemembers' rehabilitative successes. This training was administered in Syracuse, Buffalo, and New York City during the autumn of 2017. It received high praise from court professionals who learned new strategies and resources that they can leverage when Veterans and Servicemembers appear in their courts.

DVA also worked with the New York State Office of General Services to develop New York State's inaugural grant program for peer-to-peer mentoring initiatives. Given the statewide track record of rehabilitative success when Veterans mentor other Veterans who are facing criminal charges, New York State is offering \$1 million worth of funding to Veterans Treatment Courts and not-for-profit organizations that train Veteran mentors and provide mentorship for justice-involved Veterans. New York State is presently receiving applications. Recipients of this grant funding will be announced in early 2018.

Pursuing Justice Equality for Veterans through Law School Partnerships



In 2017, New York State awarded the first-ever Justice For Heroes grants, focusing on helping New York State law schools develop and maintain programs that help Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families address unmet legal needs.

Albany Law School, the Maurice A. Dean School of Law at Hofstra University, Syracuse University College of Law, Touro Law Center, and the University at Buffalo School of Law received \$50,000 apiece from these grants to establish or enhance experiential legal education initiatives that bridge the justice gap confronting many individuals who have served or are serving in the Armed Forces.

Albany Law School will use the new funding to double the number of Veterans Law Days that the school's Veterans' Rights Pro Bono Project provides during each academic year. Additionally, Albany Law School will use part of this grant to provide at least two new student internships during the summer months focusing on work related to Veterans' legal needs, and will join with community organizations to provide information workshops and further Veterans' legal assistance opportunities throughout the year.

The Maurice A. Dean School of Law at Hofstra University will use the Justice For Heroes funding to use cutting-edge technology to broaden the scope of its new Veterans Law Clinic, which focuses on discharge upgrade appeals and appellate cases involving wrongfully denied VA benefits. This will enable Veterans facing transportation barriers to receive these much-needed free legal services from the law school.

Syracuse University's College of Law will use this grant to enhance the school's Veterans Legal Clinic's ability to represent Veterans and their dependents who are seeking VA healthcare, VA compensation, discharge upgrades, and G.I. Bill education benefits. Importantly, these funds will allow the Veterans Legal Clinic to hire a Legal Fellow, thereby permitting more students to work at this clinic.



Touro Law Center's Justice For Heroes funding will enable the school to recruit and manage a multidisciplinary team focusing on meeting the needs of older Veterans and their families. The team will travel to where the Veterans are—nursing homes, senior centers, shelters, Veterans' organizations—to ensure that these Veterans have access to benefits, programs, and services that they need.

The University of Buffalo School of Law will use this money to create a brand-new Veterans Legal Practicum. This program will establish “legal help desks” at VA Medical Centers in Buffalo and Batavia, as well as other community organizations in Western New York, focusing on assisting Veterans with a variety of civil legal needs. The new practicum will also develop and maintain an up-to-date website to inform Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families in Western New York about benefits, programs, and services available to them.

In addition to the funding offered through this brand-new grant, DVA continues to work with all of New York State's fifteen law schools on cultivating opportunities for law students and faculty members to provide free legal assistance to Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families. For example, DVA is presently working with Fordham Law School in establishing a fully staffed Veterans' Law Clinic focusing on three practice areas of tremendous need: family law, consumer protection, and complex appeals to the Court of Appeals for Veterans' Claims. DVA provided Fordham with key informational resources and training in these three practice areas, and is presently assisting Fordham with expanding their reach into Staten Island and the Bronx. DVA has provided similar forms of assistance to all of New York State's law schools since the launch of Governor Cuomo's Veterans Law School Consortium in March 2014.

Introducing Benefits Advisors for Veterans in Nursing and Assisted-Living Facilities



In November 2016, the Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) spearheaded the creation of a new pilot program to help connect Veterans in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities with benefits, programs, and services earned because of their Military service. In 2017, DVA dedicated several Veterans Benefits Advisors to exclusively assist Veterans in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities throughout the state, including the four State Veterans Homes operated by the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and the State Veterans Home operated by the State University of New York (SUNY).

In 2017 alone, the Veterans Nursing Home and Assisted-Living Initiative went to over 100 facilities across the state to meet with Veterans and their families about applying for local, state and federal benefits. This Initiative ensures that a provide a centralized point of contact for nursing home administrators exists and that New York's aging Veteran population is accessing all the benefits that they earned during their service.



Providing For Dignified Interment Of Indigent Veterans

New York State launched a new program in 2017 to ensure that all Veterans, regardless of their income and assets, receive a final resting place befitting their honorable service in the United States Armed Forces. Previously, when a Veteran passed away without adequate funds to cover the resulting funeral and burial or cremation expenses, Veterans Service Organizations often wound up paying the total cost out of their organization's resources. Frequently, this placed an undue financial burden upon these organizations.

To ease that burden, New York State now will reimburse a Veterans Service Organization up to \$2,000 per interment to defray these costs. Since most counties have a negotiated reduced rate of pay with their funeral directors to cover the cost of an indigent individual's interment, this \$2,000 reimbursement from New York State will cover most, if not all, of the price tag of an indigent Veteran's burial or cremation in a New York State county.

Since the program went into full effect in the spring of 2017, DVA has already issued more than \$50,000 in reimbursements for the proper interment of Veterans who passed away indigent across New York State.



III. DVA Partnerships with Other Government Entities

Discharge Upgrades Initiative

In 2016, DVA embarked on an awareness campaign to help as many Veterans as possible obtain a discharge upgrade and bring back the honor of being a Veteran back to them. As a result of a Department of Defense memo released in 2014 and clarified in 2016, Veterans who were previously less-than-honorably discharged from the Armed Forces as a result of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) can now apply for their discharge to be upgraded.

This is of importance to Vietnam-Era Veterans who may have been less-than-honorably discharged due to actions from symptoms of PTSD or TBI before either condition was recognized as a medical diagnosis.

With over 40 accredited Veterans Benefits Advisors, all of whom received trainings on discharge upgrades, DVA is ready and able to help Veterans who feel they may have a substantial case for a discharge upgrade. Veterans' Benefits Advisors have already filed and won several discharge upgrade claims.

The Division of Veterans' Affairs is working closely with the Department of Corrections, other state agencies, and nursing facilities to increase the awareness of this policy so that many worthy Veterans can have their status reestablished with an honorable discharge. This restoration could mean having the ability to access and claim vital services like VA benefits and healthcare.

This initiative to increase awareness amongst less-than-honorably discharged Veterans, particularly those of the Vietnam-Era, will ensure that their dignity and status are restored with an honorable discharge.



Fresh Connect Checks

The "Fresh Connect" program began in 2014 as a collaboration between the Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. The program gives booklets of "Fresh Connect" checks to Veterans, Servicemembers, and members of their families worth \$2 apiece (\$20 total booklet value), redeemable for fresh food products at New York's farmer's markets. DVA has increased the number of checks distributed each year by 5,000 since 2014.

Due to this initiative's past successes, the Department of Agriculture and Markets doubled its financial allocation for this program in 2017. In 2017, DVA completed its most successful distribution year to date with 60,000 Fresh Connect Checks distributed. In addition to their cash value, these items were valuable tools for generating interest at outreach events. The Fresh Connect Checks often provided an opportunity to begin a conversation with Veterans and their families that would gradually lead to a discussion on other Veterans' benefits, programs, and services.

Feedback regarding this program from recipients and participants remains overwhelmingly positive. DVA and the Department of Agriculture and Markets plan to resume this statewide partnership during the 2018 farmers' market season.



New York State Legislation Directly Affecting Veterans

The following new laws directly impact New York State's Veterans and their families:

Veterans Property Tax Exemptions

In 2017, Governor Cuomo signed four pieces of legislation that collectively will expand or allow for the expansion of various Veterans' property tax credits, and reduce denials of qualified applications for Veterans' property tax credits.

Alternative Veterans Tax Exemption Expanded to Graphic Hand Veterans

On March 23, 1970, the President of the United States declared a state of national emergency and directed the Secretary of Defense to call reserves of the armed forces to active duty to assist the Postmaster General in restoring and maintaining postal service. The call-up, designated Operation Graphic Hand, included members and units of the New York Army and Air National Guard.

In 2016, the Legislature authorized counties, cities, villages and school districts to adopt a resolution providing for an extension of the alternative Veterans exemption to these Veterans. Towns were not granted the same authority. To allow towns the option of extending the Veterans alternative exemption to Veterans who served on active duty during Operation Graphic Hand, Governor Cuomo signed legislation granting towns the same authority granted to other forms of municipal government.



Expanding the Eligible Funds Veterans Tax Exemption to School Taxes

New York State property tax laws provide partial property tax exemptions to qualified Veterans of the United States Military who have purchased their primary residence with "eligible funds." Unfortunately, this exemption was not applicable to school taxes.

To permit school districts to offer the "eligible funds" Veterans real property tax exemption, as provided in section 458 of the real property tax law, Governor Cuomo signed legislation granting the exemption for school tax purposes if, after public hearings, the governing body of a school district, in which such property is located, adopt a local law, ordinance, or resolution.

Helping Local Assessors Correctly Apply Veteran's Alternative Property Tax Exemption

Too frequently, assessors statewide have incorrectly rejected a Veteran's application for a Veteran's Property Tax Exemption because they did not realize these brave men and women were covered under the Persian Gulf conflict for the alternative Veterans' real property tax law. To help ensure that Veterans receive the benefits they have earned through their service, Governor Cuomo signed legislation that established annual reminders for assessors that, to establish eligibility for certain Veterans' tax exemptions, the Persian Gulf conflict included several named Operations that were part of the Afghanistan and Iraqi hostilities, including Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation New Dawn and Operation Inherent Resolve.



Local Taxing Entities Granted Ability to Extend the Cold War Veterans' Exemption

A Cold War Veteran is defined as someone who served from September 2, 1945 to December 26, 1991. In 2007, the Legislature passed and then Governor Spitzer signed into law the Cold War Veterans property tax exemption which permits each county, city, village or school district to adopt a local law or resolution to provide a Cold War Veterans property tax exemption for qualifying residential real property. Under the State statute the basic exemption sunset after ten years, commencing with the first status date on or after the effective date of the local law allowing the exemption.

In 2017, the Governor signed legislation to allow for a county, city, town, village or school district, that has adopted a local law or resolution to grant the Cold War Veterans exemption for ten years, to adopt an additional local law or resolution to extend such exemption to qualifying owners of qualifying real property for as long as they remain qualifying owners, without regard to such ten-year limitation.

Enhancing Information on Veterans' Healthcare Options

The Division of Veteran's affairs maintains a healthcare fact sheet about Veteran health care options, which is posted on the DVA website and provided to Veterans admitted to a general hospital in this state. To help ensure that Veterans know of their option to utilize state operated Veteran homes, Governor Cuomo signed legislation that requires the Division to add information about the state operated Veteran houses to the DVA healthcare fact sheet.



Enhancing Sick Leave for Combat Veterans Employed by the State

Public employees who serve in our Nation's military are provided with paid leave for the greater of 30 calendar days or 22 working days in any calendar year, regardless of the type of military service. While the paid leave afforded to these dedicated civil servants is sufficient for many such individuals, sometimes additional leave for health related service is needed by our combat Veterans.

To afford these brave men and women with a minimal amount of additional leave that must be utilized for healthcare services related to their combat injury, Governor Cuomo signed legislation authorizing additional paid leave for certain employees of the State of New York with military combat experience. Because this new law is subject to a chapter amendment, the exact benefits and the effective date were uncertain at press time.

Eliminating Another Barrier to State Employment of Veterans

When men and women who have honorably served our country return home, they deserve to have every opportunity afforded to them when they seek employment. To show our gratitude for their service and sacrifice, and to encourage these hardworking men and women to enter state government, Governor Cuomo signed legislation waiving the state application fee for taking civil service examinations for honorably discharged Veterans and Veterans discharged under honorable circumstances.



Honoring Veterans with Distinctive License Plates

AMVETS is a service organization that supports and assists the honorable men and women, who are serving, or have served, in the U.S. Armed Forces from World War II until now, including the National Guard and Reserves. The members of AMVETS have served our country well and continue to be leaders in our communities. To honor and recognize their service, Governor Cuomo signed legislation to make it possible for the honorable members of this organization to display their association with a distinctive New York State license plate.

Additionally, Governor Cuomo signed legislation to honor the service of those who served in the Iraq War or the Afghanistan War, by authorizing the issuance of distinctive license plates to these Veterans or their spouses, bearing the words "Veteran of the Iraq War" or "Veteran of the Afghanistan War."



Supplemental Burial Allowance Report

This report is submitted in accordance with the requirements contained in Section 355(i) of New York State's Executive Law.

During calendar year 2017, DVA approved no applications for the \$6,000 Supplemental Burial Allowance payout.



Gold Star Parent Annuity Program Report

This report is submitted in accordance with the requirements contained in Section 367(4) of New York State's Executive Law.

Entering its eighth year of existence, New York State's Gold Star Parent Annuity continues to recognize the ultimate sacrifice paid by New Yorkers during military service. While no amount of money can ever replace the loss of a child in combat, New York provides this annuity in honor of the deceased Servicemember and his or her family, and in recognition of their tremendous sacrifice.

In 2017, New York State paid a total of \$81,250 to Gold Star Parent Annuitants. Moving into 2018, the Gold Star Parent Annuity has a standing roster of approximately 164 annuitants.



Report on Women Veterans and Special Program

Outreach continued to be an increased focus for the agency with outreach events attended in 2017 exceeding 425. DVA brochures and banners were displayed at numerous additional events. November and May are consistently strong outreach months and with the increased popularity of the FreshConnect program June and July were strong as well with DVA staff attending Farmers Markets to distribute FreshConnect checks to Veterans and their families. Total outreach events for 2016 exceeded 400 events.

Outreach events that specifically targeted Veterans over the age of 62 increased 100% from the previous year to over 30 in 2017 and events that served the homeless population totaled 8. With the increased activities of the Division of SCVOB agency requests for DVA staff to attend events related to Veteran Owned Businesses has decreased. DVA staff presented at the Boots to Business Reboot with the US Small Business Administration at five locations throughout the year.

The Women Veterans Program Coordinator (WVPC) participated in a variety of events throughout the year across the state. Some highlights included serving as the Master of Ceremonies for the La Femme Veteran's Network Second Annual Conference in March and addressing the Women Veteran's Day Observance hosted by Assemblywoman Pamela Hunter, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Women Veterans in June at the State Capitol.

When speaking about Women Veterans in New York it is important to recognize the needs of Women Veterans are unique based on gender but also on the age demographic. While the overall number of Veterans in NYS are declining numbers of Women Veterans are on the rise in NYS as well as Nationally. 8% of NYS Veterans are currently female. However, looking at the age of New York State Veterans broken down by 10 years



increments 32% of Veterans in their 30s are female. Using those same 10 year increments the largest age bracket for males is those in their 70s followed by those in their 60 and then those in their 80s. For female Veterans, the largest population is those in their 50s followed by those in their 30s followed by those in their 40s. As the female Veteran's population is significantly younger than the male population, generally issue of concern will vary greatly in terms of medical care, employment and benefits for dependents.

The WVPC continued her ongoing interaction with the Women Program Managers at each of the VA Medical centers throughout the state and the National VA Advisory Committees on Women Veterans. By staying connected, the WVPC can provide the most up to date information about VA programs for Women Veterans each year at DVA staff refresher training, as well as to the Veterans and providers she interacts with throughout her day.



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Thank you for reading the 2017 Annual Report of the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs. We welcome your questions, comments and feedback about the materials contained herein.