



2024 Annual Report

New York State

Department of Veterans' Services

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About the Department

Since 1945, the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) has assisted returning Service Members in transitioning from military to civilian life. Over the years, DVS expanded its mission to support New York State's Veterans, Service Members, and their families from all eras, connecting them to essential economic, medical, and social benefits earned through military service for 79 years.

Mission

The Department supports New York's Veterans, Service Members, and their families, offering consistent quality assistance, guidance, and advocacy to help them access earned State and Federal benefits for their military service to New York State and the United States of America.

Commissioner's Welcome Message

As we close out another successful year, our Department of Veterans' Services reflects proudly on the impactful strides made during 2024. I am proud to share this annual report showcasing the many accomplishments and initiatives that our Department of Veterans' Services achieved, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to service excellence for our Veterans and their families.

This year, we launched several new initiatives, including our Veterans Emergency Housing Program, three Mobile Outreach Units, a continuation of Operation Find and Serve, and built upon our successful collaboration with HelloFresh that has provided more than 1,800,000 nourishing meals to Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families. We also will continue expanding our Veterans Welcome Center Digital Kiosks to continue connecting Veterans with the benefits, services, support, and respect they have earned.

Throughout 2024, we expanded our partnerships to ensure that no Veteran or their family goes without essentials like clothing and food. Our focus included organizing impactful outreach events statewide, continuing our commitment to honoring all who have served. In fact, we participated in 154 special events across the state during November for Veterans Month.

The collective effort of our department has been instrumental in our success. I salute the commitment, professionalism, and excellence of our Executive Deputy Commissioner, Joel Evans, and the entire Department of Veterans' Services team for their unwavering dedication to our mission. Special thanks to Governor Kathy Hochul for her leadership and unwavering support of our Veterans, Service Members, and their families.

We remain steadfast in our mission, and continually raise the bar in service, advocacy, and support for New York's Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

Semper Fidelis,

Viviana M. DeCohen, Commissioner

By the Numbers: Serving Veterans and Their Families in 2024

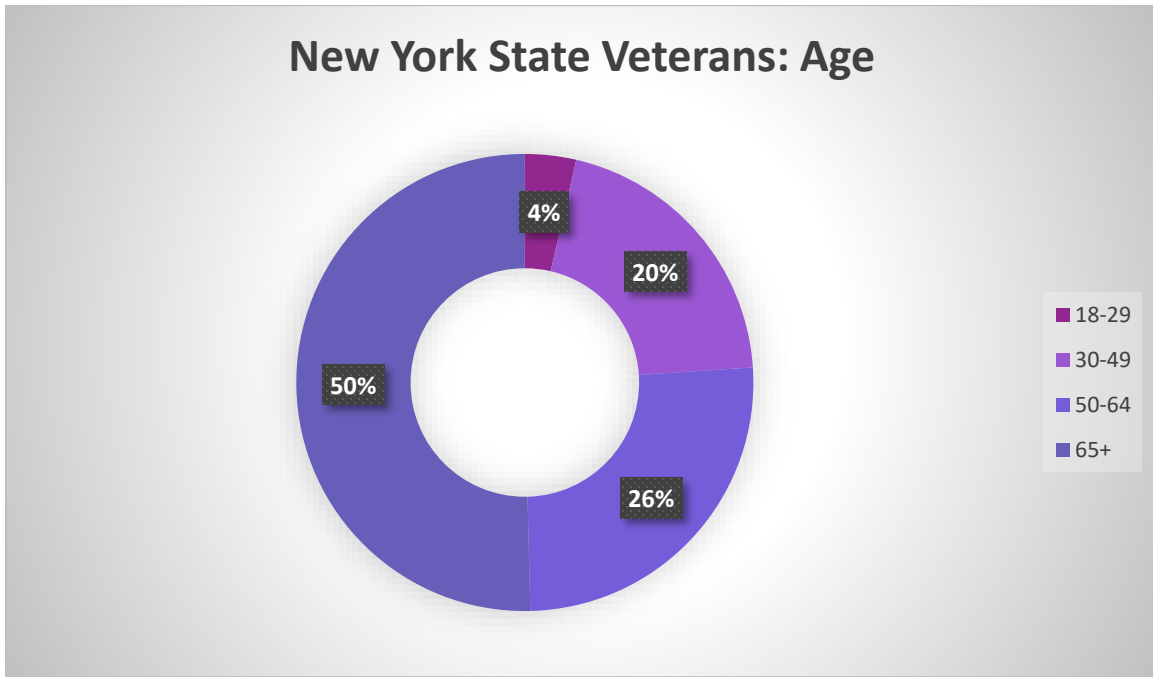
Total Number of Veterans in New York	637,542
Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) Offices	108
VA-Accredited DVS Employees	81
Counties and Cities accredited by DVS Power of Attorney (POA)	111
Money Awarded in Claims Filed under DVS POA (average monthly recurring)	\$17,503,942
Total Number of Blind Annuitants	2,486
Total Amount of Blind Annuity Payments	\$342,907.56
Total Gold Star Parents Enrolled in Annuity Program	207
Total Amount of Gold Star Parent Annuity Payments	\$121,757.40
Total Licenses with Veteran Notation Issued	288,459
Total Licenses with Veteran Notation Issued YTD	16,754
Businesses Certified as Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses	1,281
Veterans Currently Listed in the State's Veterans Temporary Hiring Portal	651
Veterans Currently Listed in the State's "55-c Program" Hiring Portal	463
Current number of 55c employees in DVS	36

Number of DVS new hires in 2024 that were 55c	4
Total Lifetime Liberty Passes Issued for 2024	12,308
Total Lifetime Liberty Passes Issued Since 2014	33,640
Recipients of New York State's Veterans Real Property Tax Exemptions	432,650 (2023)

Annual Budget – FY 2024-25

State Operations	\$14,082,000.00
Administration (General Fund)	\$1,030,000.00
Veterans Benefits Advising Program (General Fund)	\$9,931,000.00
Veterans Education (Special Revenue Federal)	\$2,221,000.00
Veterans Cemetery (Special Revenue Other)	\$900,000.00
Aid to Localities	\$15,879,000.00
Aid to Localities (not including Community Projects)	\$14,879,000.00
Special Revenue – Federal	\$500,000.00
Special Revenue – Other	\$500,000.00
Capital Projects (Cemetery)	\$4,000,000.00
Capital Projects –	\$2,000,000.00
Capital Projects – Federal	\$2,000,000.00
Agency Total	\$67,922,000.00
Reappropriations	\$44,140,000.00
State Operations	\$6,080,000.00
Aid to Localities	\$25,185,000.00
Capital Projects	\$12,875,000.00
Total reappropriations	\$88,280,000.00

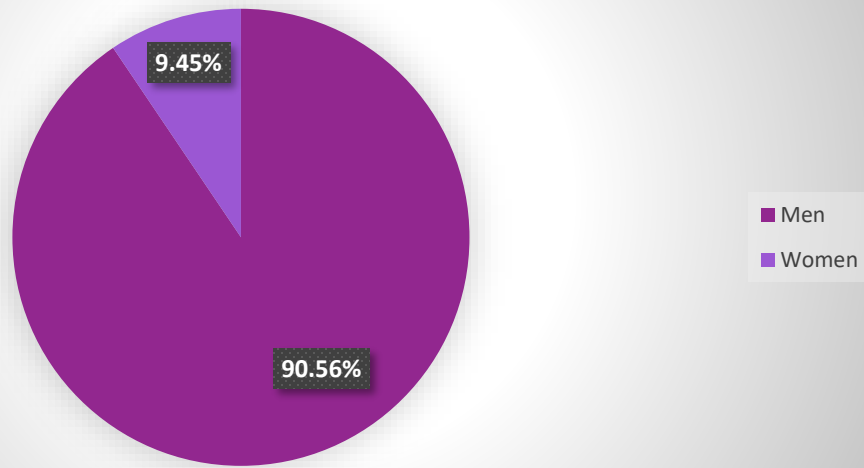
New York State Veterans Demographics



Age

18-29:	23,089	3.62%
30-49:	129,635	20.34%
50-64:	163,691	25.67%
65+:	321,126	50.37%

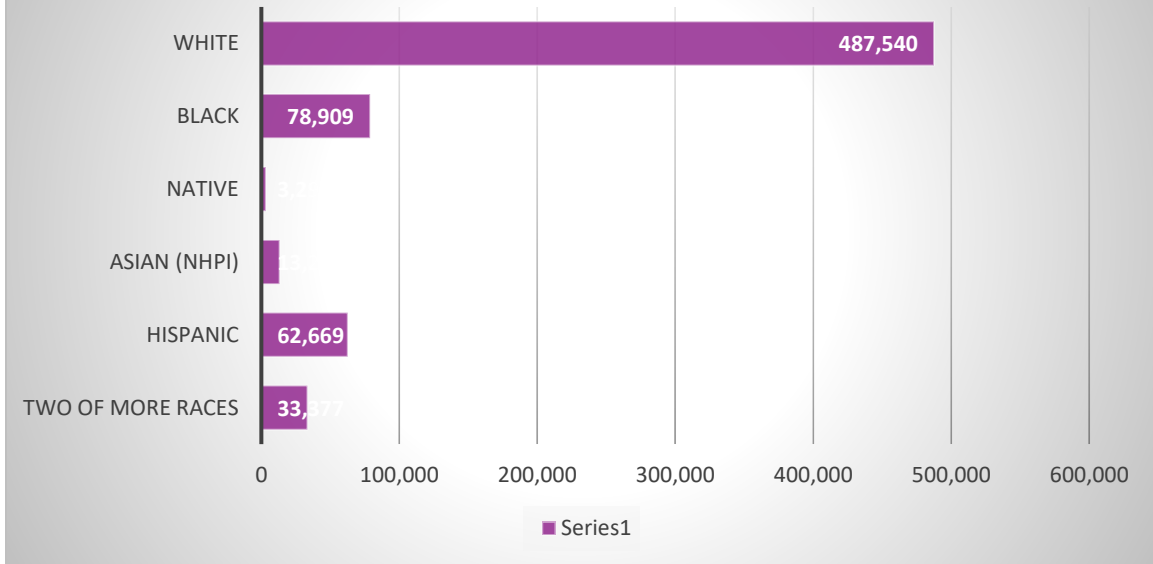
New York State Veterans: Gender



Gender

Men:	577,285	90.56%
Women:	60,256	9.45%

New York State Veterans: Race and Ethnicity



Race and Ethnicity:

White: 487,540

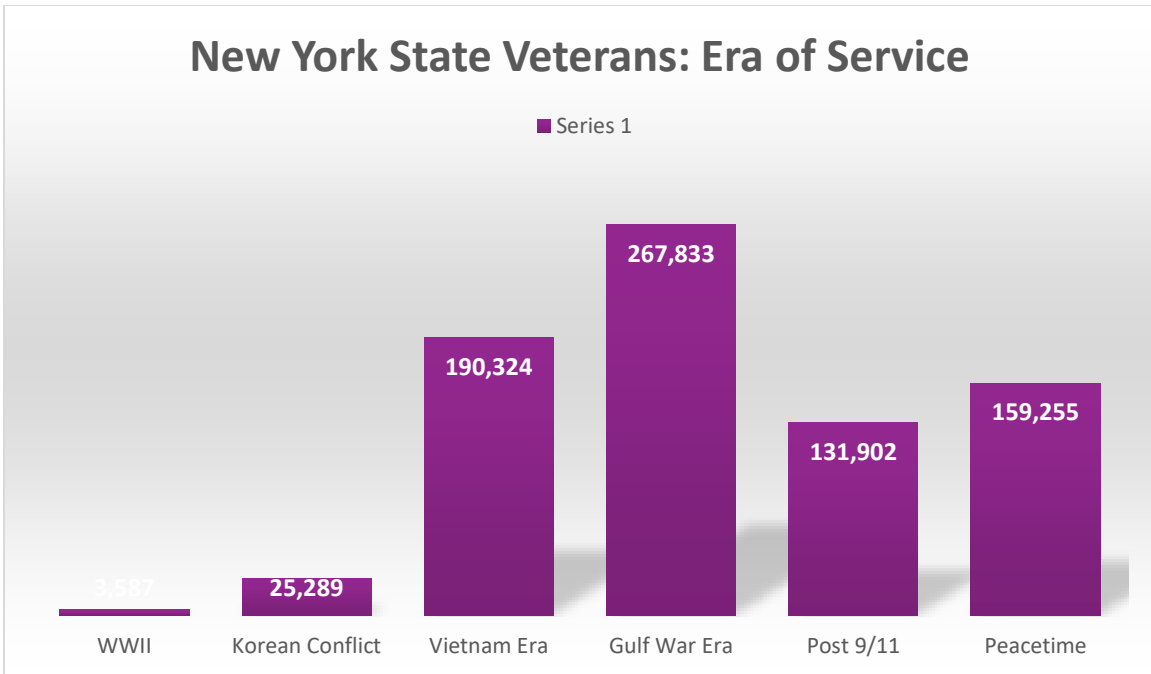
Black: 78,909

Native: 3,292

Asian (NHPI) 13,269

Hispanic: 62,669

Two or More Races: 33,377



Eras of Service:

WWII:	3,587
Korean Conflict:	25,289
Vietnam Era:	190,324
Gulf War Era:	267,833
Post 9/11:	131,902
Peacetime:	159,255

Department of Veterans' Services Highlights in 2024

Direct Agency Services to Veterans and Their Family Members

DVS's Veterans Benefits Advising Program stands as its flagship initiative. The department's accredited Veterans Benefits Advisors (VBAs), all former Service Members themselves, secure substantial annual federal VA benefits for New York State Veterans and dependents. For 2024, DVS assisted 10,692 Veterans seeking to submit benefits' claims to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and, as a result, submitted 12,069 claims for these Veterans. In 2024, appellants represented by the department have received over \$4,000,000 in retroactive payments from the VA.

As the leading Veterans claims accreditation training entity in New York State, DVS accredits and trains partners to file Veterans claims on the department's behalf via our Power of Attorney (POA). Any entity officially accredited by DVS, including county partners and nonprofits, can submit such claims. These filings help measure the effectiveness of their Veterans' advocacy work. Aggregated, these are claims filed under *DVS POA*.

In 2022, DVS and our accredited partners filed 33,409 claims through DVS POA. In 2023, 34,922 such claims were filed. For 2024, the figure was 41,496. In terms of claims specifically filed by *DVS staff*, 7,897 were filed in 2022, 10,987 were filed in 2023, and 12,069 were filed in 2024, respectively.

By prioritizing Fully Developed Claims, DVS significantly reduced waiting times, ensuring swift access to deserved benefits. Furthermore, our Advisors facilitate Veterans' access to VA healthcare, State Veterans' Homes, local assistance programs, and private initiatives aiding Veterans and their families.

Veterans Education Program

New York currently has approximately 2,716 approved educational and training facilities, providing opportunities for nearly 18,742 Veterans statewide. These programs not only support Veterans in furthering their education and careers but also bring significant economic benefits to the state. Last year, they contributed more than \$403 million to New York's economy.

Gold Star Parent Annuity Program

New York's Gold Star Parents — mothers and fathers (including adoptive parents and stepparents) of service members killed in action, as defined by federal law — are eligible to receive a biannual annuity payment from the State. There are currently 207 recipients receiving the annuity annually. In calendar year 2024, \$121,757.40 in payments were initiated for a total of 414 payments. Effective January 1, 2025, the rate for this program will be raised to \$602.90 annually. All Gold Star Parents residing and domiciled in New York State are eligible for this annuity, regardless of their household income.

Blind Annuity Program

New York State also 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. As of November 2024, 2,486 current enrollees receive the Annuity.

From January 1, 2024, through November 2024, New York State paid a total of \$342,907.56 to Blind Annuitants. Each year, the Blind Annuity dollar amount is eligible to change in accordance with a cost-of-living increase between one and four percent. The rate for the calendar year 2024 was \$1,654.50. These payments are broken down to 12

equal installments distributed monthly. Effective January 1, 2025, the rate for this program will be increased to \$141.33 monthly for a yearly total per recipient of \$1,695.96.

Supplemental Burial Allowance

New York State's Supplemental Burial Allowance helps defray funeral and interment costs for Service Members who died in 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. In 2024, no reimbursement requests were made from the Supplemental Burial Allowance.

Indigent Burial Reimbursement

All individuals who served in this nation's military merit a dignified final resting place. To ensure this, DVS provides reimbursement of up to \$2,000 to a congressionally chartered Veterans Service Organization or Veterans Service Agency when their county or municipal government requests them to cover the funeral and interment costs of a Veteran who passed away without sufficient funds to pay for these services. This year, the Indigent Burial Reimbursement Program provided \$175,987.00 to defray these funeral and interment costs.

Restoration of Honor Act

Since 2020, the Restoration of Honor Act has empowered DVS to reinstate State Veterans Benefits for those with Other-Than-Honorable Discharges. Factors such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and former federal policies that instill prejudice against sexual orientation and gender identity are considered. More than 50 benefits become

accessible with an "honorable" determination, prompting DVS to aid in upgrading discharge statuses, and unlocking further life-changing programs.

To date, 50 Veterans, including many survivors of military sexual trauma and those adversely impacted by biased policies, have received favorable decisions, recognizing the true nature of their honorable service to our state and nation.

DVS Commissioner DeCohen contacts each Restoration of Honor Act recipient personally to share this life-changing news with them and travels statewide to hand-deliver the award letter to grateful recipients.

Launching the New York State Veterans Emergency Housing Fund

In February 2024, DVS launched the pilot program of the New York State Veterans Emergency Housing Fund, developed to provide rapid short-term assistance to Veterans who are homeless or confronting imminent risk of homelessness. Within this program's first day of existence, DVS had granted seven applications from Veterans across the state who were in dire need. This work continued to accelerate throughout the duration of the pilot program. By the time the pilot program ended, DVS had granted applications for housing-related assistance of up to \$2,000 apiece for 91 Veterans in 28 counties.

Notably, the applications from most of these Veterans represented their first-ever contact with DVS. Each applicant received an individualized screening from an accredited DVS VBA, with many of these screenings demonstrating that the Veteran was eligible not only for this short-term fund but also for longer-term federal and state benefits, including disability compensation, non-service-connected pension, VA healthcare enrollment, the G.I. Bill, and the New York State Veterans Tuition Award. In each applicable case, DVS represented the Veteran successfully in the claim for the benefit(s) for which they were eligible, providing a sustained long-term impact on their lives.

The many positive outcomes from the pilot program of this fund included:

** A Veteran was abruptly laid off from his job when the business for which he worked downsized. He quickly became unable to make his rent payments. His landlord filed papers to evict him from his residence in Albany County. His \$2,000 payment allowed him to pay his arrears to the landlord's satisfaction, allowing him to remain in his home.

** A Veteran and his wife were at risk of their landlord evicting them from their residence. They were in financial distress after the Veteran suffered a stroke, ending his post-military career as a long-haul truck driver. The landlord kept pressuring the family for the money to pay their rent and sent notice of intention to evict. The \$2,000 from the Emergency Housing Fund staved off the landlord's attempts at eviction long enough for the Veteran's Social Security disability payments to begin, allowing the couple to remain securely in their living space.

** A Veteran took custody of her sisters' two young children after they were found to be living in dangerous conditions in another state. While adjusting to the new expenses of raising two children while being underemployed, the Veteran fell behind in her car payments and her vehicle was repossessed. The \$2,000 payment gave her enough money to get her car back.

** A Veteran and his wife incurred a major unexpected expense when their oil tank (sole source to heat home) abruptly broke, could no longer hold any oil, and could not be repaired. The oil company informed them that the cost would be \$5,000 for them to get the tank replaced. The retired couple could not quite afford the full amount that it would cost to replace the tank. With the approval of the \$2,000 from the Emergency Housing Fund, they were able to replace the tank in time for this winter.

** A Veteran lost his home and home-run business in a fire. His insurance would cover the structural repair costs but would not replace any of his personal effects needed for daily living. The Veteran literally had nothing left. The approval of \$2,000 allowed the Veteran and his family to replace some basic items needed for safe and stable daily living.

Based on the success of this pilot program, DVS launched the full-fledged Veterans Emergency Housing Fund program. Daily, new applications arrive and receive rapid attention from DVS's team of VBAs who are working on these cases.

Daily, the lives of Veterans who are facing unforeseen struggles that have left them homeless or at imminent risk are changed for the better because of the funds provided through this program and because of the additional benefits and resources that DVS helps these Veterans attain.

Statewide Initiatives and Programs

New York State Veterans Human Rights Conferences

DVS is, and will always remain, committed to viewing services through a human rights lens. Throughout 2024, DVS partnered with several agencies and organizations to present widely attended programs focusing on the human rights issues, needs, and initiatives of Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families. These programs included:

** Hosting and leading the inaugural two New York State Government Diversity, Equity & Inclusion conferences, each of them lasting two full days and each of them attended by Veterans Liaisons, Language Access Coordinators, Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinators, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Coordinators. Both the New York City and Albany iterations of these conferences received excellent reviews from the New York

State employees who attended, and both programs led to the creation and augmentation of productive inter-agency partnerships.

Both conferences covered eight overlapping subject areas for the attendees: Understanding Intersectionality in the Veteran Community, Addressing Mental Health Stigma in the Veteran Community, Promoting LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Veteran Services, Cultural Competency in Serving Veterans of Color, Accessibility and Inclusivity in Veteran Programs, Trauma-Informed Care for Veterans, Supporting Women Veterans, and Building Allyship in the Veteran Community.

Each section provided presentations from subject-matter experts in these fields of work and offered abundant opportunities for attendees to ask questions, gain information, and network with each other. Based on this success, DVS plans to make these conferences an annually recurring group of events.

** Working with multiple groups of caregivers of Veterans throughout New York State to ensure that the Veterans receiving the care as well as the caregivers themselves are fully appraised of the benefits, services, and resources available to them.

** Hosting and presenting three programs honoring the service of women in the United States Armed Forces in the month of June when Women Veterans Day is celebrated.

** Providing training at four collaborative programs with Social Workers across multiple regions of New York State focusing on cultivating a climate of military cultural competency within the social work profession in New York.

** Presenting in featured speaking roles in "Vet-To-Vet Cafe" online programs hosted by Metropolitan Jewish Health Services, focusing on improving the military cultural competency of medical professionals throughout New York State and enhancing the

ability of medical providers to better address social determinants of health as they pertain to Veterans and Military Families.

** Joining with multiple governmental and private sector partners to present "Allies And Warriors," a special program at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in New York City honoring the legacy of service of Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces, as well as speaking and providing direct assistance and advocacy at several programs held on sovereign tribal lands.

** Co-facilitating a workshop with Veterans and Military Families from the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) that proved pivotal in the vital effort to ensure that these Veteran and Military Family firefighters were properly recognized for their service and fully connected to the benefits and resources earned by virtue of their military service.

** Collaborating with the New York State Department of Corrections & Community Supervision to deliver programs for Veterans who are incarcerated at correctional facilities throughout New York State, including Mid-State, Gouverneur, Attica, Groveland, and Rikers Island.

** Providing the featured presentation for the plenary session of the Annual Conference of the New York State Defenders Association, focusing on improving services for Veterans in the criminal justice system before an audience of more than 200 defense attorneys and family law attorneys from across every region of the state.

** Delivering featured presentations at a Nassau County Bar Association program focusing on ways to improve access to justice for Veterans in both the civil law and criminal law contexts, including (but not limited to) character of discharge upgrades, landlord-tenant disputes, family law matters, debtor-creditor actions, and efforts to assist Veteran small-business owners.

** Speaking at Cornell Law School in a program focusing on needed improvements in law and policy to better-represent Veterans who are survivors of military sexual trauma.

Expanding the Reach of New York’s Digital Veterans Welcome Centers

Since Veterans Month 2021, DVS has worked tirelessly to place its digital Veterans Welcome Centers in high-traffic locations throughout New York State, providing an easily accessible way for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families to learn what they have earned and to connect with the New York State agencies that facilitate these programs and services. With informational screens provided by DVS as well as the New York State Department of Labor, the New York State Department of Human Rights, the New York State Office of Mental Health, the New York State Office for the Aging, the New York State Department of Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Development, and the State University of New York, the Veterans Welcome Center provides Veterans and Military Families with quick and easy access to information about benefits, programs, services, and resources.

Fifteen Veterans Welcome Center Digital Kiosks are now fully operational throughout New York State, with plans to install more during 2025. These Veterans Welcome Centers are placed in high-traffic, widely visible locations outside of the traditional Veterans’ services spaces — including Grand Central Station, Buffalo-Niagara International Airport, the main pavilion at Niagara Falls State Park, Palisades Center Mall, Woodbury Common, Tompkins County International Airport, and Welcome Centers throughout the New York State Thruway — enhancing the possibility that they will be seen by Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families who may have never learned about their earned benefits.

This year, at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) conference, the Secretary of the United State Department of Veterans Affairs honored

DVS with the Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award, recognizing the widespread success of this initiative. DVS looks forward to building on this momentum during 2025 and beyond.

Welcoming the Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to New York on Memorial Day

In May 2024, DVS welcomed the Hon. Denis McDonough, Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, to the New York State Veterans Cemetery – Finger Lakes to deliver his annual Memorial Day address and to present the Memorial Wreath of the VA to New York. Secretary McDonough selected New York as the site of his address following a highly competitive search that was open to any grant-funded State Veterans Cemetery in the nation.

The ceremony featured additional remarks from Brigadier General Michael W. Bank of the New York State Division of Military & Naval Affairs, Assemblymember Phil Palmesano, Seneca County Administrator Kyle Lovell, and retired New York State Senator Michael Nozzolio, along with DVS leadership. Attendance at this program of remembrance and commemoration was excellent, and feedback likewise has been excellent from everyone who attended. Notably, seven Directors of County Veterans Service Agencies were among the attendees, including five County Veterans Service Agency Directors who had never visited the New York State Veterans Cemetery before.

Honoring Children of Military Families

Military service impacts the entire family, not solely the Service Member. In recognition of this, DVS proudly celebrates the national Month of the Military Child every April with a full slate of programs available free of charge for the children of Service Members and Veterans across New York State to enjoy side-by-side with their parents. Opportunities

for military children, and their parents, grandparents, and guardians, throughout the month of April 2024 included:

** A behind-the-scenes tour of Citi Field, home of the New York Mets, which included batting practice in the clubhouse, photo opportunities in the dugout and bullpen, visits to VIP areas of the ballpark, a special surprise appearance from Mets legend Dwight "Doc" Gooden, and free tickets for the full family to a future game.

** A full day at Niagara Falls State Park, including visits to the Aquarium of Niagara, the Cave of the Winds, and the thrilling Maid of the Mist boat tour, with trolley transportation from one site to another and a ceremony at the end of the day honoring the service of all military children in attendance.

** A Taylor Swift-themed day at the Rochester Museum & Science Center, including various craft stations and a laser show in the planetarium set to Taylor Swift's music, with a pizza party that followed.

** Exclusive guided tours of Howe Caverns, one of the most remarkable caves in the United States, concluding with an underground boat ride.

** An afternoon at the Museum of Broadway in Manhattan, experiencing the magic of Broadway from its earliest days all the way through the present.

** A visit to the Bailiwick Animal Park in Hudson, with animals from every continent to meet and feed.

** A visit to the All Things Oz Museum in the hometown of *Wizard of Oz* author L. Frank Baum, with up-close-and-personal looks at memorabilia from the original book and the MGM movie, from the Broadway musical *Wicked*, and to various Oz-related tribute films and shows throughout the years.

** A behind-the-scenes look at Lyndhurst, the historic Gould mansion on the shores of the Hudson River, during the mansion's lavish flower show.

This year, these programs had the largest total attendance of children and parents (and, at many events, grandparents) since DVS began holding Month of the Military Child events. A grand total of 301 military children – and 427 Military Family members in all – took part in DVS's Month of the Military Child programs this year.

Collaborating With Carnegie Hall for Military Families

In November 2023, DVS launched a special new partnership with Carnegie Hall. Through this collaboration, Service Members and Veterans who were parents of a child between the ages of 0 and 2, or who were expecting the upcoming birth of a child, had the opportunity to join with professional musicians through Carnegie Hall's renowned "Lullaby Project" to create and record a lullaby for their child.

Based on the success of this year's pilot collaboration, DVS and Carnegie Hall joined forces in autumn 2024 for a second round of individualized sessions for Service Members and Veterans to meet with professional recording artists, work with them to create an original lullaby for their child and receive a professional recording of that lullaby provided by the Carnegie artists. This year, parents of children of any age — not just parents of children between the ages of 0 and 2 — are welcomed to participate. More than 60 Military Families are currently taking part in this special experience. The entire program is provided free of charge to the Service Member or Veteran, with all costs covered by Carnegie Hall.

Honoring Asian American Veterans of the Vietnam War

On March 29 — a date honored nationally as Vietnam War Veterans Day — DVS led a first-of-its-kind celebration with the Lt. B.R. Kimlau American Legion Post in New York City's Chinatown. This program welcomed a packed-to-the-rafters crowd into the Kimlau Post Auditorium of Vietnam War Veterans from the Asian American communities along with their spouses, children, and grandchildren.

Every Vietnam War Veteran in attendance received one of Governor Hochul's Vietnam War Veterans Day Proclamations. This program was extremely well-received by everyone present, including a Vietnam War Veteran and his wife who flew from Nevada to New York solely to attend this ceremony, and two Vietnam War Veterans who had served together in combat but had not seen one another since 1971. DVS has conducted multiple follow-ups with the Veterans who attended this program, connecting them with benefits and services that they were previously not receiving.

Joining Forces with the New York State Inspector General for Veterans to Leverage their Right to Vote

One of the unfortunate ironies is that Veterans of the United States Military who put their lives on the line to protect and defend the rights of citizens to vote too often are unable to vote themselves in their first year after their date of discharge, as they are frequently are unaware of where their polling places are located, how to engage in early voting, when and where they can obtain an absentee ballot, and other key pieces of information.

In September 2024, DVS and the Office of the Inspector General collaborated to prevent this from happening to Veterans and Military Families in New York State. The two agencies developed and co-signed a letter that was sent to recently discharged Veterans who have returned home to New York State, providing information about the services of each agency, and providing information about deadlines, locations, and resources regarding the upcoming election.

Commissioner DeCohen and Inspector General Lucy Lang also joined forces to create and release a video that shared this information with Veterans and their families across the state. Both efforts were well-received, ensuring that the New Yorkers who served this nation courageously were able to leverage the right to vote that they so honorably protected and defended through their military service.

Preventing Food Insecurity for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families

In June 2020, DVS joined forces with the Governor's Anti-Hunger Policy Coordinator to establish a new program amid the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic: an initiative focusing on preventing food insecurity among Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families. To the surprise of many, Veterans face food insecurity at above-average rates, with post-9/11 Veterans confronting food insecurity at nearly twice the rate of their non-Veteran counterparts. With the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating this already-difficult situation, an immediate need arose for a program that could help Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families put healthy meals on their tables.

Establishing a partnership with generous donations provided by the meal kit company HelloFresh, in close collaboration with many outstanding community-based partners, New York State was able to develop a pipeline of meals to Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families in need of this assistance.

Today, this partnership has provided more than 1,800,000 nourishing meals to Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families. DVS is immensely grateful to HelloFresh for this innovative collaboration, and to every community-based partner that has allowed this work to sustain for more than three years, a list that includes, but is not limited to, New York City's Department of Veterans' Services, Black Veterans for Social Justice, and The Campaign Against Hunger. These collaborations continue in addressing this ongoing

need, with this initiative slated to surpass the 2,500,000-meal milestone in February 2025.

Focusing on Sustainable Suicide Prevention Strategies for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families

The Governor's Challenge, a collaboration between the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations (SAMHSA) and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), brings state government entities together with private and not-for-profit partners to develop and implement statewide suicide prevention best practices for Service Members, Veterans, and Military Families, utilizing a public health approach. New York formed a delegation for this initiative in March 2020 and has remained highly active in this work ever since, receiving national recognition this year from SAMHSA and the VA for their initiatives.

The work of the Governor's Challenge has provided many opportunities for DVS to increase access to information and tools for assisting providers and staff with suicide-prevention. Some of these initiatives include:

** Certifying all of DVS's public-facing staff this year in Mental Health First Aid for Service Members, Veterans, and Military Families, taught to DVS by a nationally certified trainer and focusing on evidence-based strategies to assist Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families during times of mental health crisis. In addition to DVS personnel, DVS has brought this training to County and City Veterans Service Officers throughout the year and, most recently, to bartenders at Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion Posts to equip as many people as possible with this training.

** Training all DVS personnel, as well as Veterans Service Officers throughout New York State, several peer mentors from the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program, Veterans Liaisons from New York State's executive branch agencies, leaders from New

York's chapter of the American Gold Star Mothers, and other frontline Veterans' advocates throughout New York State in the use of the "Columbia Protocol" suicide prevention risk assessment tool.

** Enhancing and sustaining lethal means safety strategies across the state. Prior to this year, the Governor's Challenge delegation launched "Worried About A Veteran," an evidence-based online resource focusing on helping family members engage in difficult – yet potentially life-saving – conversations with a loved one regarding lethal means safety, from safe storage of firearms and ammunition to the proper disposal of potentially dangerous medications.

Building on this work, the New York Health Foundation awarded a grant to the Governor's Challenge delegation to develop a high-quality "train the trainer" model that allows interested Veterans and Military Family members to receive high-quality training in the lethal means safety realm and then utilize this training to assist other Veterans and Military Families this sensitive but essential area of focus.

Additionally, DVS provided several trainings this year to clinical mental health professionals at United States Department of Veterans Affairs facilities focusing on the intersection and integration of laws, regulations, policies, and military cultural competency in dialogues with Veterans regarding firearms safety.

** Sustaining and expanding the growing "Onward Ops" (formerly known as "ETS Sponsorship") collaboration as one of the nation's most active "Onward Ops" states. This initiative focuses on connecting trained "sponsors" – a term derived from military service, where a "sponsor" welcomes a Service Member who has just arrived at a new duty station to help guide them through their transition – with Service Members in the months leading up to their discharge from military service. As the first year of transitioning back to the civilian world following military service can be one of the most dangerous times in a Veteran's life – with heightened national rates of suicide, homelessness, food

insecurity, criminal justice involvement, and other negative factors – the Onward Ops program’s mission of providing sponsors to these Veterans for their first post-military year is truly lifesaving.

New York is proud that Fort Drum is one of the nation’s premiere adopters of the Onward Ops efforts. Through the “CARES Up” grant program, New York State provides financial support for entities that commit to providing sponsors to these Veterans in transition, with a new round of CARES Up grantees for Onward Ops work upcoming in 2025.

** Continuing to grow the “Welcome To New York” initiative focusing on connecting faster with Veterans returning to New York State at the conclusion of their military service. After a couple of years of discussions and negotiations, New York State now receives access to a weekly spreadsheet of contact information for newly discharged Veterans from the Defense Manpower Data Center of the United States Department of Defense (DoD). Each of these returning Veterans receives a “Welcome Home” letter signed by the Commissioner and Executive Deputy Commissioner of the Department.

Furthermore, DVS established an Outreach Team devoted largely to contacting each returning Veteran on this weekly-delivered spreadsheet by phone (and by email, if the Veteran provided DoD with their email address) to screen for benefits eligibility, housing needs, connections for employment assistance, and any other service with which DVS or any of DVS’s collaborators can assist.

Lastly, DVS gained access this year to monthly data reports from the Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program (TAP), with each of these reports providing even more granular data — including email addresses — for Veterans returning after their military service to New York State, providing DVS with yet another means of early connections and early actions to improve the homecoming experiences of these Veterans and their families.

Unveiling the Inaugural Members of the New York State Women Veterans History Trail

For Veterans Month 2024, DVS announced creation of the New York State Women Veterans History Trail, along with the inaugural individuals who will be featured on this virtual trail. The “Inaugural Eleven” are:

** Dr. Mary Edwards Walker (Oswego), the first woman to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

** Col. Eileen Collins (Elmira), the first woman to command a Space Shuttle mission.

** Admiral Grace Hopper (Poughkeepsie), a technological pioneer whose work is still widely cited.

** Margaret Corbin (West Point), who stepped forward when her husband was killed at the Battle of Fort Washington and took over his cannon until she, too, was wounded.

** Dr. Oliva J. Hooker (White Plains), the first Black woman to serve on active duty in the United States Coast Guard.

** Harriet Tubman (Auburn), the famed “Moses of Her People” whose Underground Railroad heroism often overshadows her triumphs leading Soldiers in battle.

** Clara Barton (Dansville), the “Angel of the Battlefield” who founded the American Red Cross.

** Gen. Ann E. Dunwoody (Cortland), the first female four-star general officer.

** Capt. Elsie S. Ott (Smithtown), the first woman to receive the United States Air Medal.

** Sr. Chief Petty Officer Shannon Kent (Pine Plains), the first woman to operate with Naval Special Warfare in combat.

** The United States Military Academy Class of 1980 (West Point), the first gender-integrated Academy class.

DVS looks forward to working with partners across New York State in the months and years to come in the expansion of the Women Veterans History Trail, allowing us to share the extraordinary stories of courageous women with connections to New York State who have served this state and nation valiantly.

Celebrating Veterans and Military Families During Veterans Month

DVS made the recognition, celebration, and honoring of Veterans a priority throughout November for Veterans Month, participating in an incredible 154 events across the state.

DVS itself held a first-of-its-kind Veterans Month celebration in Albany, honoring the service of Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families throughout the Capital District and beyond. The program began with two “sold-out” trolley tours — with the second tour added by popular demand — to sites of Military significance throughout Albany, narrated by DVS. It then proceeded with a concert of big band classics and patriotic favorites performed by the Yankee Doodle Band, the oldest continuously operating American Legion band in the nation, along with a ceremony honoring the service of all Veterans, Service Members, and Military Family members in attendance.

The program ended with every Veteran in attendance receiving a Veterans Month Proclamation signed by New York State Governor Kathy Hochul. More than a hundred people attended this event, ranging in age from 28 to 91. Reviews from attendees were extremely positive, along with many requests to hold something similar next year.

In New York City, a delegation of DVS employees, including several leaders from DVS's executive staff, marched in the Veterans Month Parade through the "Canyon of Heroes," the largest Veterans Month Parade in the nation. Featured in DVS's delegation was one of DVS's new Veterans Mobile Outreach Unit vehicles. The widespread visibility that this parade offers provided excellent positive attention for the Veterans Mobile Outreach Center initiative and to DVS overall, including a spotlighted moment on ABC7NY-TV featuring DVS's delegation carrying the departmental banner on 5th Avenue.

For the fourth consecutive Veterans Month, DVS took part in Operation Green Light, an initiative that began in New York and has since spread throughout the nation to provide a highly visible form of support to Veterans and Military Families. Landmarks across New York State were lit in green for the entire night, with these bridges, skyscrapers, train stations, convention halls, and even Niagara Falls illuminated with this reminder of New York State's enduring commitment to Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families.

Hosting Inaugural Program Honoring Veterans in State Service

Every day, the lives of New Yorkers are changed for the better because of the service of Veterans who now work for New York State's executive branch agencies. On November 13, DVS honored that remarkable legacy in "Serving Then, Serving Now," DVS's inaugural program celebrating the service of Veterans who continue to serve the public good in a multitude of key agency roles.

Held in the beautiful Huxley Theatre of the New York State Museum, the program included a musical presentation by the 42nd Infantry Division Brass Quintet, keynote remarks by Major General Michel A. Natali of the New York State Army National Guard, the playing of a video created by NYS Media Services at DVS's request honoring Veterans in State service and featuring one Veteran from each military branch who currently works for the State, and presentations by State leaders honoring all Veterans in attendance.

All Veterans received one of Governor Hochul's Veterans Month Proclamations and a special lapel pin commemorating their state service as well as their military branch. A reception for all attendees followed this program. Based on positive feedback from attendees at the program, DVS looks forward to making this celebration of Veterans in state service an annual event.

Successful Appellate Advocacy for Veterans in New York State

Throughout 2024, the Department's Appellate Unit fiercely advocated for New York's Veterans and Military Families at the United States Board of Veterans' Appeals, presenting meticulously researched briefs and exhibits to the assigned Veterans Law Judges. This dedication resulted in over \$14 million in total retroactive payments, including \$4.1 million earned this year alone. These efforts focused our limited resources to correct the wrongful denial of benefits, ensuring these individuals finally received the federal benefits owed to them.

DVS was so successful in ITS Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA), advocacy, complemented by our unprecedented 100 percent hearing attendance rate sustained since 2022, that DVS quickly exhausted almost all the VA legacy appeal backlog under the NYS DVS power of attorney.

In 2024 the BVA Chairman, the Honorable Jaime Areizaga-Soto, focused the BVA solely on reducing the backlog of legacy appeals at the expense of Appeals Modernization Act appeals. In the spirit of resource efficiency, the Appellate Unit dynamically re-tasked, our limited resources, to advocate on selected VA Regional office proposals to reduce benefits, significantly restoring, and in some cases increasing, benefits for Veterans in jeopardy of unjustly losing their disability compensation benefits.

The DVS Appeals Review Team coordinated with VA and conducted a total of 185 hearings in the past year while sustaining our 100 percent attendance rate, eclipsing the 67 percent Department of Veterans' Affairs attendance rate.

DVS's advocacy resulted in the adjudication of 292 Board of Veterans Appeals decisions in 2024 with 222 Board decisions granting benefits, at an extraordinary 76 percent grant rate on appeal. The result speaks volumes to the dedication of the entire field and appellate team at DVS and our commitment to advocacy, in support of the Veterans of the Empire State.

Our task will not get easier in 2025, as the DVS Appellate Unit/Appels Review Team has 415 BVA appeals on the docket, 166 of which are scheduled for a hearing, all expected to be released by the Chairman of the BVA sometime in 2025.

DVS continues to foster our ongoing partnership with the National Veterans Legal Services Program which ensures top-tier legal representation at no charge before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claim and the Federal Circuit. This collaboration safeguards their earned benefits without financial loss and extends the reach of NYS DVS.

DVS Partnerships with Other Government Entities

FreshConnect Checks

The “FreshConnect” program began in 2014 as a collaboration between the Department of Veterans' Services and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. The program gives booklets of “FreshConnect” vouchers to Veterans, Service Members, and members of their families. Recipients receive 25 vouchers totaling \$50 (each voucher is worth \$2). Vouchers are redeemable for fresh food products at New York’s farmer’s markets.

2024 marked the tenth successful year of DVS’s partnership with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to distribute FreshConnect Checks. DVS distributed \$223,500 (Western Region) and \$148,500 (Eastern Region) worth of FreshConnect checks during this year’s farmers’ market season.

2024 was the third year County/City Veterans’ Service Agencies (VSAs) were invited to participate in the distribution of FreshConnect checks. \$225,000 in coupons were issued to 44 County/City Veteran Service Agencies to distribute and they were very thankful for the partnership. 2023 and 2024 saw significant increases in allotted checks from the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

In 2022, they allocated DVS \$200,000 in vouchers, in 2023, they allocated \$500,000, and in 2024, they allocated an additional \$100,000; totaling \$600,000. DVS and the Department of Agriculture and Markets plan to resume this statewide partnership during the 2025 farmer’s market season.

Outreach Events and Activities

In 2024, the Department continued to make outreach to local Veteran communities a priority by participating in 543 in-person and virtual events. DVS brochures, materials, and signage were prominently displayed at numerous additional events.

Notable outreach events in the Western region included several Pact Act enrollment events that were sponsored by the Western New York US Department of Veteran Affairs Healthcare System. These successful events began in 2023 and continued throughout 2024 bringing in numerous Veterans that previously were not receiving benefits.

Additionally, DVS VBAs conducted outreach to DOCCS facilities; assisting incarcerated Veterans and Veteran DOCCS employees obtain benefits they earned through their service. VBAs attended various farmers' markets to distribute FreshConnect vouchers to New York Veterans and their families. The New York State Fair was another successful outreach event as attendance was significantly higher than the previous post-COVID years.

In 2024, DVS continued its commitment to reaching Veterans and their families in local communities through its "Find and Serve" initiative. This focused effort aimed to connect with Veterans where they live, work, and play, strengthening its outreach endeavors.

Throughout the year, DVS prioritized engagement in over 543 in-person and virtual events, representing a seven percent increase over 2023, reaching an estimated 3,000+ Veterans, ensuring our brochures and materials were prominently displayed for a broader audience.

In the Western Region, DVS participated in several impactful events, including PACT Act enrollment events sponsored by the Western New York U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Healthcare System. These initiatives attracted numerous Veterans who had previously been disconnected from essential benefits. DVS also actively engaged in events like the Seneca Nation's Veterans Pow Wow in Salamanca, NY, the 2023 Buffalo Economic Development Initiative, and the inaugural Veteran's Appreciation Event hosted by New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) at the Attica Correctional Facility, where DVS acknowledged staff members who are Veterans.

In 2024, DVS has designed, built, and deployed three Mobile Outreach Units to increase both visibility and accessibility of department services throughout the state. Stationed in Buffalo, the Capital Region, and Montrose, these branded Mobile Units are already making a significant impact. Deployed for Veterans Month, the Mobile Units have already been leveraged for 16 events and will be prominent in DVS outreach efforts going forward.

The formalization of the NYS Emergency Housing Fund Program, granting up to \$2,000 to New York Veterans facing housing emergencies, has also strengthened DVS outreach efforts. Since program reopening, DVS has been in contact with over 80 Veterans facing housing emergencies and assisted not only with housing matters, but other programming applicants were previously unaware of. DVS expects this program to expand exponentially in impact and outreach potential through 2025.

Additionally, VBAs made significant efforts by attending various farmers' markets, where they distributed FreshConnect vouchers to New York State Veterans and their families, further supporting their well-being. DVS's commitment to outreach remains steadfast, ensuring that Veterans across New York State receive the support and resources they deserve.

Notable outreach events in the Eastern region included new community partnerships with the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), New York State Troopers, Fort Hamilton, Farmingdale Army Reserve Unit's Transition Assistance Program, and multiple in person events with Westchester Community College and other SUNY establishments, with Mental Health and training endeavors, for student Veterans and previously unreached populations. Sponsored events include aide and attendance, SAGE Vets collaborations, and SUNY and CUNY speaking engagements. These successful events began in 2023 and continued throughout 2024, encouraging new referrals of Veterans and families which previously were not receiving benefits.

Advancing Accreditation Training

Throughout 2024, DVS continued to make significant strides in continuous education and accreditation for Veterans' advocates, fostering an environment to stay abreast of evolving laws and practices. Notably, the Annual Training in October 2024, held both in person and online, drew approximately 150 participants, including representatives from County Veterans Service Agencies, city departments, and accredited Veterans Service Officers like those from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Family Foundation, and the "VetsFirst" component of the United Spinal Association.

The Learning Team's monthly online training averaged 150 participants per session, covering various topics within the realm of Veterans' law. These sessions, offered at no cost, saw a consistent increase in attendance over the past several years, benefiting both DVS and county/municipal Veterans Service Agencies across New York. Of note, this year the Connecticut Department of Veterans Services employees across their five districts participated in the eleven monthly training sessions.

DVS continues to extend accreditation and training to various organizations, including the New York City Department of Veterans' Services, Veterans Rebuilding Life, Black Veterans for Social Justice, the VetsFirst component of the United Spinal Association, and NYS tribal nations, as well as the University at Buffalo School of Law and Syracuse University School of Law. This accreditation grants access to specialized tools and technologies such as VetOps and DPRIS, facilitating smoother processes for claims and appeals.

New York State Legislation Directly Affecting Veterans

Expansion of the Veterans Tuition Awards Program

Legislation S8696-A/A9205-A

Beginning on November 11, 2024, eligibility for the Veterans Tuition Award will include Veterans who served for at least 4 years and reside in the State, regardless of whether they served in combat. By removing the combat service requirement, more Veterans

than ever before in New York State will gain access to higher education opportunities, opening new doors for Veterans who reside in New York State in sustainable, rewarding career paths in their chosen post-military professions.

Expands Access to Veterans' Benefits

Legislation S5195-B/A4611-B

This legislation removes wartime service requirements for certain benefits. New York State proudly recognizes that all Veterans deserve the benefits and resources afforded by the State that they have protected and defended through their military service. This legislation amends current law by removing the requirements that Veterans must have served during a specifically defined period of wartime service to access important state Veterans' benefits and services.

Establishes Veterans' Liaisons Within State Agencies

Legislation S7544/A7173

Numerous New York State agencies offer vital services for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families. To exemplify the "no wrong door" approach of State government toward serving those who serve our nation, this legislation directs New York State agencies to designate a Veterans' Liaison to provide information and assistance to Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families regarding benefits and services available within that State agency, and to coordinate directly with the New York State Department of Veterans' Services.

Improves Access to Information About Veterans' Benefits

Legislation S9258/A9850

Accurate information about Veterans' benefits is one of the most important tools to place in the hands of Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families. This legislation ensures that individuals requesting and obtaining a Veteran notation on their New York State driver's license or non-driver identification card receive information about the services that New York State's Department of Veterans' Services provides free of

charge, as well as the option to connect directly with the Department of Veterans' Services to receive individualized attention and advocacy from the Department.

Additional Financial Support for Veterans' Funerals

Legislation S2413-C/A4613-C

Beginning on April 1, 2025, New York State will regularly increase its reimbursement program to aid in covering the funeral and internment costs for Veterans who pass away indigent. Providing an honored final resting place for those who have served our state and nation is one of New York's sacred and essential duties. This legislation will ensure that no Veteran in New York State ever goes without their rightful final honors.

Military Leave for New York State Port Authority Employees

Legislation A6834A/S6623, Chapter 343 of the Laws of 2024.

This legislation provides various rights and protections to military Service Members and Veterans employed by the New York State Port Authority. These rights and protections include leaves of absence for military duty and service schools, pay for up to thirty days of military duty, pay for combat Veterans while utilizing any healthcare related to their service, and protects Veterans from diminution of time service, increment, vacation, or holiday privileges because of time missed during military service. This legislation will ensure New York State Port Authority employees receive the same protection as all other New York State public officers and employees.

Improved Identification of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Training and Information Programs

Legislation S8076/A8485, Chapter 105 of the Laws of 2024

Beginning on March 1, 2024, the New York State Office of Mental Health will identify and publish links to training programs and information regarding the diagnosis and treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Veterans. Highlighting and improving access to this information will create a better understanding of PTSD and

ensure Veterans receive the proper care they need during and after their dedicated service to the State and nation.

Increases State Buying Thresholds from Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses

Legislation S8082/A8562, Chapter 110 of the Laws of 2024

This legislation increases State agencies' contracting thresholds with minority, women, and service-disabled Veteran-owned businesses. By increasing this threshold, the State creates additional business opportunities for service-disabled Veteran-owned businesses, allowing these businesses to accept more contracts or more expensive projects without concern for exceeding contract thresholds. This legislation will allow New York State to lead from the front by directly engaging with Veteran-owned businesses in the stream of commerce, ensuring Veterans receive plenty of opportunities to succeed in the business world.

Updated Definition of Gold Star Families for the Free Use of Campsites

Legislation S8067/A8568, Chapter 103 of the Laws of 2024

As of April 1, 2024, New York State provides Gold Star family members free access to State parks, historic sites, and recreational facilities across New York State. This legislation updates the definition of "member of a Gold Star family," clarifying eligibility requirements and achieving the intent of the original legislation signed in 2023. Allowing Veterans and Gold Star Families free access to our New York State Parks will provide them with outdoor spaces to spend time with loved ones and take in the natural beauty of New York State.

New York State Veterans Cemetery – Finger Lakes

After months of preparation and design work by PLAN Architecture, in July 2023 Seneca County, on behalf of DVS, released the requests for proposals for the construction of a

columbarium and a new, enlarged maintenance building and maintenance yard at the New York State Veterans Cemetery – Finger Lakes, the first Veterans’ cemetery owned and operated by New York State. In late September, the bids were opened, and the winning contractors were announced. On October 1, 2023, the National Cemetery Administration notified the DVS that New York State had been awarded a cemetery expansion grant of nearly \$4 million in federal funding for construction at the cemetery. Construction began in April 2024, and as of this report’s writing the material shelter has been erected, the columbarium is almost complete, the maintenance building is erected, and internal framing and masonry are ongoing. If the weather holds and no issues arise, basic construction should be completed by the summer of 2025.

Homeless Veterans Assistance and the Veterans' Remembrance and Cemetery Maintenance and Operation Funds Report

This is the report for the calendar year 2024, required by New York State Consolidated Laws State Finance, Article 6, § 99-V, and § 97-mmmm regarding the utilization of funds for the Homeless Veterans Assistance and the Veterans' Remembrance and Cemetery Maintenance and Operation funds. The total dollars in the Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund as of December 2024 was \$1,446,730.00. The total dollars in the Veterans' Remembrance and Cemetery Maintenance and Fund as of December 2024 was \$1,626,529.00.

Supplemental Burial Allowance Report

This report is submitted per the requirements contained in Section 354-b(4)(i) of New York State’s Executive Law. During the calendar year 2024, there were no payments of the \$6,000 Supplemental Burial Allowance paid out by DVS, as DVS did not receive any applications from individuals eligible for Supplemental Burial Allowance. There were no

new rules or regulations promulgated in the calendar year 2024 related to the supplemental burial allowance.

Gold Star Parent Annuity Program Report

This report is submitted per the requirements contained in Section 367(4) of New York State's Executive Law. 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 Service Member and their family and in recognition of their tremendous sacrifice. As of November 2024, New York State paid a total of \$121,757.40 to 207 Gold Star Parent Annuitants.

Women Veterans and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Report

DVS is committed to honoring the service and sacrifice of all those who have served in the United States Uniformed Services and New York State Militia and is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all agency programs and outreach to ensure that no Veteran is left behind in New York State.

New York State's Veterans population is broadly diverse: of the state's approximately 637,542 Veterans, 30.05 percent are racial and ethnic minorities, and 9.45 percent are women.

Throughout 2024, DVS worked to renew and expand outreach and services to ensure all Veterans and their family members are served equitably, regardless of age, race, creed, color, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, sex, marital status, disability, branch or era of service, or discharge status. The department's daily work includes continuous efforts to improve cultural competency and overall understanding of the unique needs that historically underrepresented populations of

Veterans, Service Members, and their families face, using this as the foundation for developing strategies to gain the trust of these populations and to serve their needs successfully.

These populations include (but are not limited to):

Black:	78,909
Native:	3,292
Asian (NHPI)	13,269
Hispanic:	62,669
Two or More Races:	33,377

This report offers 2024 highlights focused on the department's ongoing efforts in promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). DVS's dedication to fulfilling its mission to serve all Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families remains stronger than ever, affirming our commitment to providing sensitive, culturally competent, high-quality services.

DVS's 2024 DEI work and initiatives included public programming to actively engage a broad community (federal, state, local, public, and private) through virtual and in-person events, workshops, talks, and other activities. This engagement is designed to educate and facilitate connection by providing information about DVS's critical mission.

Examples of 2024 public programming include:

** New York State Department of Veterans' Services' Black History Month Program which engaged participants nationally, statewide, and across Territories.

** The 2024 Inaugural Hispanic Heritage Month program engaged participants throughout New York as well as the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut).

** Offering DEI Conferences in both the New York City and the Capital Region in April 2024.

Throughout November 2024, DVS has engaged and/or partnered with:

** The Shinnecock Indian Nation to provide Veteran's benefits check-ups and provide resources in observance of Native American Heritage Month.

** The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian for the "Allies and Warriors" Native American Veteran's Month program. The event featured impactful speakers from DVS including Commissioner Viviana DeCohen, Special Assistant for Community Engagement, Dr. Lessie Branch, and Deputy Counsel Benjamin Pomerance. This special event also included DVS Commissioner Viviana DeCohen presenting Veterans Month Proclamations signed by Governor Kathy Hochul.

** New York State Department of Health, Albany County, and local colleges and universities to provide free health screenings and free hairdos and hair care services via DVS's Haircuts Across The State (H.A.T.S.) Program for those who have served.

** Establishing a relationship with New York State Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Office who were invited to the Office to New York State Department of Veterans' Services' annual training in October 2024 to address department and county partners.

** Engaging with Pace University in August 2024 for a talk on "Serving the Medically Underserved – A Veteran's Perspective" to provide cultural humility to future clinicians. DVS is currently working to expand the offering to other colleges in 2025.

** Expanding engagement with New York State Houses of Worship to aid them in establishing Veterans and/or Health and Wellness ministries.

** Participating in career/outreach fairs/stand downs hosted by State Civil Service colleagues.

** Advancing DVS Services and Programming re Women Veterans: In 2024, DVS hosted quarterly virtual programs for women Veterans titled "Feast, Facts, and Friends." DVS also hosted Women Veteran's Recognition Days events in Albany, Syracuse, and Watertown, respectively.

** Hosting an "Hour of Power" online webinar that introduced the Women Veteran's Advisory Committee to New York State women and gave an opportunity to women Veterans in attendance to share what their most pressing concerns are and what they would like to see from the Advisory Committee.

** Work on Task Forces and Committees: New York State Department of Veterans' Services is well represented on a variety of Task Forces and Committees, with meetings taking place in-person and virtually. Committees and/or Task Forces that require regular reporting.

** Drafted three potential proposals in connection with the Master Plan for Aging from a Veterans' perspective.

** Introduced a new partner, Southern Westchester BOCES, for the Workforce Development Task Force to partner with New York State Department of Veterans' Services.

** Sharing an excel workbook that notes Committees and Task Forces and designated a DVS individual who serves, with the workbook effectively functioning as a “living” document.

2024 Highlights: Empowering and Supporting New York's Women Veterans

Throughout 2024, DVS sponsored and participated in numerous events and programs to highlight the importance of serving, supporting, and honoring New York's women Veterans. Here is a look back at some of DVS’s key events and efforts.

** February 2024: Celebrating Black History Month – In February, DVS hosted a virtual “Fab Friday” event, “Celebrating & Serving Black Veterans: A Black History Month Conversation with New York State Department of Veterans' Services.” DVS honored the distinguished history of, and discussed ways to continuously improve services for, New York's Black Veterans and their families. Speakers included Dr. Lessie Branch, U.S. Navy Veteran, Special Assistant for Community Engagement, DVS, Jeremy Butler, CEO, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, U.S. Navy Veteran, COL (Ret.) Stephanie Dawson, U.S. Army Veteran, Venecia DeRoose, U.S. Navy Veteran, and Commissioner James Hendon, U.S. Army Veteran, New York City Department of Veterans' Services.

** March 2024: Celebrating Women’s History Month – In collaboration with Disabled American Veterans (DAV), DVS hosted “Women Who Served,” a webinar featuring vital discussions on veterans' issues, focused on women's concerns, disabilities, and healthcare.

** March 2024: SAGEVETS Event – This special event focused on Women’s History Month and featured the following participants: Darcy Connors, Executive Director, SAGEServes, Viviana DeCohen, Commissioner, DVS, Elisa Crespo, Executive Director, New Pride Agenda; and Rita Gram, SAGEVets Participant.

** March 2024: Tompkins County Women Veterans Inaugural Reception – DVS Commissioner Viviana DeCohen delivered the reception’s keynote address focused on building community collaboration and inspiring action.

** March 2024: Women Veterans Getting Their Due: A Women’s History Month Conversation with New York State Veterans’ Services – This virtual event featured Elizabeth Estabrooks, Deputy Director of the VA Center for Women Veterans, discussing the latest services and benefits for women veterans. Attendees also heard from women Veteran leaders across New York on the challenges women Veterans face in accessing benefits and services, and how the state can continue to improve services for this fastest-growing population of Veterans. Speakers included Elizabeth Estabrooks, U.S. Army Veteran, Deputy Director, VA Center for Women Veterans, Sharon Bailey, U.S. Army and Air Force Veteran, Veteran Outreach Administrator, PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Vet to Vet Program at BRIDGES in Rockland County, Tracy LoTemple, U.S. Navy Veteran, Director of Veteran Services, CompeerCORPS, and Lynn Magistrale, U.S. Navy and Air Force Veteran, Program Coordinator, WNY Heroes.

** March 2024: DVS partnered with the Barbara Giordano Foundation for a Resource Fair and Seminar at Montrose VA, introducing virtual monthly holistic wellness programs like "Lunch with Laughs" as part of the DVS Wellness Wednesday series.

** April 2024, Empowering Women Veterans Webinar – DVS and the Center for Women Veterans hosted a webinar, "Women Veterans’ Services in New York State: Empowering Their Journey," which provided an overview of Women Veterans in New York and shared DVS’s commitment to supporting them. Key statistics shared included:

- DVS’s continued commitment to bringing more and more women who served into local, state, and federal systems to assist them;
- 9.5% (~63,000) of New York’s Veterans are women;
- In the past year, over 1,400 women who served have worked with DVS staff;

- New York State’s Women Veterans Coordinator creates, facilitates, and runs numerous programs and initiatives throughout the State to engage with those individuals who may not identify with the moniker of Veteran; and
- New York State continues to engage with partners such as the Center for Women Veterans and the National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators to ensure that New York’s women veterans are benefitting from the wisdom and expertise of these national networks.

Outreach Initiatives:

** June 2024: Second Annual Women Veterans Recognition Day – DVS sponsored a three-day event sponsored by DVS and held in Albany. Activities included trainings, community-building activities, a Veterans Benefits Resource Fair, and a special tour of the State Capitol.

** August 2024: DVS sponsored the “Feast, Facts, and Friends Webinar Series” to continue empowering women Veterans, a new quarterly lunchtime webinar series in collaboration with the New York State Office for the Aging focused on topics to help empower women Veterans and improve their quality of life.

** Benefits Briefings: In collaboration with DVS and DAV, focused on women Veterans and their unique needs and provided tangible resources for women Veterans.

** Ongoing Partnerships: DVS continued its productive partnerships with Bombas Socks and Operation Cookie Drop, expanding to now include hygiene products and bookbags. DVS is working with partners to supply Girl Scout cookies, cans of nuts and candy for Veterans, and book bags for Veterans' children filled with essentials.

** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Conference: DVS hosted an impactful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Conference for all state agencies, focusing on the unique needs of veterans, especially women Veterans.

DVS remains dedicated to fostering a supportive community and prioritizing the holistic well-being of New York's women Veterans and meeting their specialized needs.

State Veterans Nursing Homes 2024 Data (Estimates)

Current number of beds in service

Total - 749

- Montrose – 252
- Oxford – 171
- Batavia – 126
- St Albans - 200

New admissions for 2024

Total - 455

- Montrose – 101
- Oxford – 111
- Batavia – 43
- St Albans - 200

Number of Days of Care for 2024

Total – 201,020

- Montrose - 49,049
- Oxford – 52,969
- Batavia – 43,948
- St Albans - 55,054

Average occupancy for 2024

Total - 611

- Montrose – 196
- Oxford – 116
- Batavia – 119
- St Albans - 180

Number of Adult Day Health Care visits for 2024 – N/A

Current number of FTEs at the facility Total - 902

- Montrose – 221
- Oxford – 288
- Batavia – 169
- St Albans - 224

Current number of volunteers Total - 68

- Montrose – 16
- Oxford – 35
- Batavia – 7
- St Albans - 10

Total number of volunteer hours for 2024 Total – 14,855

- Montrose - 2,848
- Oxford – 2,829
- Batavia – 480
- St Albans – 8,698

Patient Demographics: Age, gender, and service era of residents (broad overview allowable under HIPPA) (Oxford, Montrose)

Veteran Males: 264 / Ages 65-101

WWII (21)

Korean Conflict (56)

Vietnam Conflict (166)

Persian Gulf (3)

Peacetime (25)

Air Force = 17 Veterans

Army = 83 Veterans

Coast Guard = 2 Veterans

Marine Corps = 17 Veterans

Navy = 24 Veterans

Veteran Females: 14 / Ages 58-92

Non-Veteran Females: 88 / Ages 71-100

*9 Purple heart Recipients Reside in Montrose

Training and Development: Hours of staff training and professional development activities

Total – 5,747.3 hours

Community Engagement: Number of community events or partnerships

- VA Hudson Valley HealthCare- Montrose Castle Point Campus's
- NYP/Hudson Valley Hospital and other local Hospitals
- Calvary Hospice Services
- 66 Events

Addenda A - County Veterans Service Agencies

Albany County Veterans Service Agency

162 Washington Ave, 7th Floor

Albany, NY 12210

Phone: (518) 447-7710

Allegany County Veterans Service Agency

6085 State Route 19N

Belmont, NY 14813

Phone: (585) 268-9387

Cattaraugus County Veterans Service Agency

County Office Building

1 Leo Moss Drive, Suite 6510

Olean, NY 14760

Phone: (716) 701-3298

Cayuga County Veterans Service Agency

95 Genesee Street, 3rd Floor

Auburn, NY 13021

Phone: (315) 253-1281

Chautauqua County Veterans Service Agency

567 Fairmount Avenue Warwick Plaza

Jamestown, NY 14701

Phone: (716) 661-8255

Columbia County Veterans Service Agency

389 Fairview Avenue Suite 8

Hudson, NY 12534

Phone: (518) 828-3610

Cortland County Veterans Service Agency

60 Central Avenue Box 5590

Cortland, NY 13045

Phone: (607) 753-5014

Delaware County Veterans Service Agency

97 Main Street Suite 4

Delhi, NY 13753

Phone: (607) 832-5345

Dutchess County Veterans Service Agency

1335 Route 44, Suite #2

Pleasant Valley, NY 12569

Phone: (845) 486-2060

Erie County Veterans Service Agency

Rath Office Building

95 Franklin Street Suite 800

Buffalo, NY 14202-3919

Phone: (716) 858-6363

Franklin County Veterans Service Agency

355 West Main Street, Suite 200
Malone, NY 12953-1826
Phone: (518) 481-1540

Fulton County Veterans Service Agency

County Office Building, Basement Room 10
223 West Main Street
Johnstown, NY 12095
Phone: (518) 736-5651

Genesee County Veterans Service Agency

3837 West Main Street Road
Batavia, NY 14020
Phone: (585) 815-7905

Greene County Veterans Service Agency

159 Jefferson Heights Suite D-303
Catskill, NY 12414
(518) 943-3703

Hamilton County Veterans Service Agency

102 County View Drive
Lake Pleasant, NY 12108
Phone: (518) 548-6651

Herkimer County Veterans Service Agency

109 Mary Street Suite 1103
Herkimer, NY 13350-2925
Phone: (315) 867-1127

Jefferson County Veterans Service Agency

175 Arsenal Street 2nd Floor
Watertown, NY 13601
Phone: (315) 785-3086

Lewis County Veterans Service Agency

Court House
7660 North State Street 1st Floor, Room 120
Lowville, NY 13367
Phone: (315) 377-2065

Livingston County Veterans Service Agency

7 Murray Hill Drive
Mt. Morris, NY 14510
Phone: (585) 243-7960

Madison County Veterans Service Agency

County Office Building #4
138 North Court Street P.O. Box 546
Wampsville, NY 13163
Phone: (315) 366-2395

Monroe County Veterans Service Agency

125 Westfall Road
Rochester, NY 14620
Phone: (585) 753-6040

Montgomery County Veterans Service Agency

Montgomery County Office Building
PO Box 1500 64 Broadway
Fonda, NY 12068-9802
Phone: (518) 853-8152

Mount Vernon Veterans Service Agency

City Hall, Room 4
1 Roosevelt Square
Mt. Vernon, NY 10550
Phone: (914) 665-2319

Nassau County Veterans Service Agency

2201 Hempstead Turnpike, Building Q
East Meadow, NY 11554
Phone: (516) 572-6565

Hempstead Veteran Services

1 Washington Street
Hempstead, NY 11550
Phone: (516) 812-3506

Glen Cove Office of Veterans' Services

City Hall
9 Glen St, 2nd Floor
Glen Cove, NY 11542
Phone: (516) 695-1812

NYC Department of Veterans' Services

1 Centre Street, Suite 2208
New York, NY 10007
Phone: (212) 416-5250

Niagara County Veterans Service Agency

175 Hawley St
Lockport, NY 14094
Phone: (716) 438-4090

Oneida County Veterans Service Agency

800 Park Avenue
Utica, NY 13501
Phone: (315) 798-5830

Onondaga County Veterans Service Agency

421 Montgomery Street 10th Floor
Syracuse, NY 13202
Phone: (315) 435-3219

Ontario County Veterans Service Agency

3010 County Complex Drive
Canandaigua, NY 14424-9505
Phone: (585) 396-4185

Orange County Veterans Service Agency

111 Craigville Road
Goshen, NY 10924
Phone: (845) 291-2470

Orleans County Veterans Service Agency

13996 Route 31
Albion, NY 14411-9303
Phone: (585) 589-3219

Oswego County Veterans Service Agency

1 Broad St
Pulaski, NY 13142
Phone: (315) 591-9100

Otsego County Veterans Service Agency

140 County Highway 33W
Cooperstown, NY 13326
Phone: (607) 547-4245

Putnam County Veterans Service Agency

110 Old Route 6 BLDG 3 – Room 45
Carmel, NY 10512
Phone: (845) 808-1620

Rockland County Veterans Service Agency

20 Squadron Boulevard Suite 480
New City, NY 10956
Phone: (845) 638-5244

St. Lawrence County Veterans Service Agency

80 State Highway 310 Suite 5
Canton, NY 13617-1495
Phone: (315) 386-4754

Saratoga County Veterans Service Agency

2144 Doubleday Avenue, Suite 15
Ballston Spa, NY 12020
Phone: (518) 884-4115

Schoharie County Veterans Service Agency

County Office Building
284 Main Street 3rd Floor
Schoharie, NY 12157
Phone: (518) 255-9762

Schuyler County Veterans Service Agency

Human Services Complex

323 Owego Street Unit #2
Montour Falls, NY 14865
Phone: (607) 535-2091

Seneca County Veterans Service Agency

1 DiPronio Drive
Waterloo, NY 13165
Phone: (315) 539-1633

Steuben County Veterans Service Agency

7001 County Route 113
Bath, NY 14810-1510
Phone: (607) 664-2527

Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency

H. Lee Dennison Executive Office Building
100 Veterans Memorial Highway P.O. Box 6100
Hauppauge, NY 11788
Phone: (631) 853-8387

Sullivan County Veterans Service Agency

County Government Center
100 North Street P.O. Box 5012
Monticello, NY 12701
Phone: (845) 807-0233

Tioga County Veterans Service Agency

56 Main Street
Owego, NY 13827
Phone: (607) 687-8228

Ulster County (NY) Veteran Services Agency

5 Development Court
Kingston, NY 12401
Phone: (845) 340-3190

Warren County Veterans Service Agency

1340 State Route 9
Lake George, NY 12845
Phone: (518) 761-6342

Washington County Veterans Service Agency

Municipal Center
383 Broadway
Ft. Edward, NY 12828
Phone: (518) 746-2470

Wayne County Veterans Service Agency

7376 Route 31, Suite 1300
Lyons, NY 14489
Phone: (315) 946-5993

Westchester County Veterans Service Agency

10 County Center Road, 2nd floor, Suite 204
White Plains, NY 10607
Phone: (914) 813-5145

Wyoming County Veterans Service Agency

36 Center St
Suite B2
Warsaw, NY 14569
Phone: (585) 786-8860

Yates County Veterans Service Agency

417 Liberty Street Suite 2120
Penn Yan, NY 14527
Phone: (315) 536-5196

Yonkers Veterans Service Agency

120 New Main Street
Yonkers, NY 10701
Phone: (914) 377-6700

Addenda B - Women Veterans by County

Albany, NY	1,352
Allegany, NY	240
Bronx, NY	2,937
Broome, NY	686
Cattaraugus, NY	419
Cayuga, NY	336
Chautauqua, NY	665
Chemung, NY	468
Chenango, NY	223
Clinton, NY	724
Columbia, NY	224
Cortland, NY	258
Delaware, NY	174
Dutchess, NY	956
Erie, NY	4,806
Essex, NY	250
Franklin, NY	249
Fulton, NY	305
Genesee, NY	283
Greene, NY	262
Hamilton, NY	41
Herkimer, NY	378
Jefferson, NY	2,142
Kings, NY	5,561
Lewis, NY	172
Livingston, NY	293
Madison, NY	373

Monroe, NY	2,962
Montgomery, NY	255
Nassau, NY	2,225
New York, NY	2,838
Niagara, NY	1,292
Oneida, NY	1,160
Onondaga, NY	2,485
Ontario, NY	582
Orange, NY	1,958
Orleans, NY	186
Oswego, NY	716
Otsego, NY	279
Putnam, NY	274
Queens, NY	4,054
Rensselaer, NY	901
Richmond, NY	839
Rockland, NY	379
Saint Lawrence, NY	527
Saratoga, NY	1,452
Schenectady, NY	808
Schoharie, NY	160
Schuyler, NY	92
Seneca, NY	183
Steuben, NY	785
Suffolk, NY	3,418
Sullivan, NY	292
Tioga, NY	267
Tompkins, NY	319

Ulster, NY	769
Warren, NY	413
Washington, NY	329
Wayne, NY	456
Westchester, NY	1,497
Wyoming, NY	210
Yates, NY	121