

## General News

### Making New York More Affordable For Veterans

Assemblyman Jake Ashby is calling on the Legislature to pass his bill which would exempt veterans 85 years and older from paying New York state income tax (A.5995). The legislation was recently blocked by the Assembly Majority in the Ways and Means Committee. The legislation is aimed to make New York more affordable for the many aging veterans across the state.

“For everything the veterans of past generations have done, New York should be doing more to make life more affordable. I am disappointed in the decision of the Majority members of the Ways and Means Committee to hold this legislation, but I will not give up on fighting for this important cause,” said Ashby. “I intend to keep speaking with my colleagues across the aisle to gain support for this bill so we can get something positive accomplished for our veterans and their families.”

According to 2018 data from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, New York has roughly 91,000 veterans who are 85 years or older.



Assemblyman Jake Ashby

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

### Columbia County Vets Rep Backs Delgado’s MST Bill

Submitted by the Office of Congressman Delgado

U.S. Representatives Antonio Delgado and Nancy Mace of South Carolina have introduced the VA Peer Support Enhancement for MST Survivors Act. The bipartisan bill establishes a peer support program at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for survivors of Military Sexual Trauma (MST).

“Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma deserve comprehensive support at every step of their healing process,” said Rep. Delgado. “This bipartisan bill ensures survivors seeking their earned benefits from the Veterans Benefits Administration receive trauma-informed support. I want to thank members of my NY-19 Veterans Advisory Committee for sharing their experiences with this critical issue affecting so many women and men who served our country, and for helping to shape this legislation.”

“When our military men and women are violated or abused by their teammates, it is our duty to ensure they have the tools and support they need to heal,” said Rep. Mace. “Currently, survivors of sexual assault in the military do not have access to peer support through

### DA Donnelly Panelist For EDPRT Training

Rensselaer County District Attorney Mary Pat Donnelly has announced she will participate in the week-long EDPRT (Emotionally Distressed Persons Response Team) training, along with the Troy Police Department, East and North Greenbush Police Departments, Rensselaer Police Department, Hoosick Falls Police and Rensselaer County Probation.

“Dealing with emotionally distressed individuals is a part of the job for police officers and case workers and there is training available to deal with these interactions,” said District Attorney Mary Pat Donnelly. “Our goal is to better equip law enforcement and agencies on how to deal with suicidal persons, complex behaviors and interactions that come along with these encounters.”

“As a panelist I will identify how mental illness plays a role in the prosecution of individuals found to have mental health issues,” said Donnelly, “de-escalation and diversion skills are key when law enforcement finds themselves in a situation with a troubled individual.”

Topics covered during the week-long training have included mental illness and personality disorder training, hospital procedure training, role playing and Veteran’s mental health training.

### Cindy Harrison Memorial Scholarship... Continued from page 3

Berlin graduates who have overcome obstacles and/or struggled through adversity are eligible. Cindy was a Petersburg firefighter and officer that despite battling cancer continued to be an active member until just before her death.

The successful applicant should exemplify the interests and values of Cindy as evidenced by a caring nature, active involvement in the community and concern for others. Applications are available at the Berlin Guidance office and must be postmarked by June 1.



U.S. Representative Antonio Delgado

the Veterans Benefits Administration. Our bill corrects this, and creates an advocate system similarly found at the Pentagon and elsewhere in the Defense Department.”

“As a retired Army Command Sergeant Major and now a VSO, I find it absolutely revolting to listen to the horrible, disgusting MST stories that I encounter when processing claims for Veterans,” said Gary Flaherty, Director of the Columbia County Veteran’s Service Agency. “Our county is small, yet we have 9 MST cases. It is particularly a struggle to get a MST case approved for male Veterans. Regardless of whether a male or female Veteran, we know that military personnel were and are hesitant to seek help. Thanks to Congressman Delgado’s introduction of this critical legislation, these Veterans will finally be heard.”

While the Veterans Health Administration has a peer support system for MST survivors and the Department of

Defense has its own victim advocate program, the VBA has no similar programs. As such, MST survivors receive no formal mental health support as part of their application process at the VBA—the agency responsible for administering financial benefits and programs for veterans including service-connected disability compensation, non-service-connected pension, vocational rehabilitation, G.I. Bill benefits, and more.

### Legislative Notes

During its April 13th meeting the Rensselaer County Legislature unanimously adopted a resolution urging New York State to create a crime database of all convictions of animal cruelty.

This resolution, introduced by Majority Leader Ken Herrington, comes after members of the Legislature Minority suggested a Local Law proposing the creation of an Animal Abuse Registry in Rensselaer County.

The local law has undergone several modifications and revisions, and is still being worked on by members of the Legislature in collaboration with District Attorney Mary Pat Donnelly.

“Currently there are about 19 counties that have animal abuse registries, each with different rules, requirements and fees. We need consistency from county to county and a state registry could provide that,” said Chair of Finance Robert Loveridge of East Schodack.

### Other Meeting Highlights

Provided by the Office of the Minority

**Tax Stabilization Fund** – As a result of 2020 cost reductions in the legislative budget, the legislators unanimously approved the transfer of these savings, totaling \$202,903.45, from the 2020 budget to the County’s Tax Stabilization Fund. Staying under the tax cap and saving the taxpayers any additional funds remains our priority.

**2020 Census And Redistricting** – The Minority Legislators sponsored a resolution, which was approved by a 15-4 vote, for a fair and equal redistricting process. The process to accurately determine the demographic changes, the growth or decline in population, is essential to guarantee equal voter representation. We also require full transparency and that the funding is not paid to an outside entity as in the past.

**Cap On Food Delivery Service Fees** – The Minority legislators also sponsored a resolution to cap third party food delivery fees at 15%. As the COVID-19 pandemic surge closed down the food service industry, take-out and delivery became their life sustaining option. Some third party delivery enterprises charged fees as high as 30%, cutting into an already tight profit margin. The resolution was approved by a 12-7 vote.

**Aging** – For our seniors, the legislature unanimously approved personal care and respite services, and renewed two leases for three years each for the senior centers in Rensselaer and Grafton.

### Summer Meals Program

U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska have introduced legislation to expand summer meal programs across the country to ensure children maintain access to nutritious meals when school is out. The COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent switch to remote learning, exacerbated the challenges that food insecure students face when schools are closed. The Summer Meals Act would improve the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Summer Food Service Program, which provides low-income children — who would normally receive free or reduced lunch during the school year — with nutritious meals during the summer, after school, and when school is closed for vacations or emergencies. The bill would expand eligibility and participation for summer meal programs, facilitate program administration, and improve access to these critical programs in hard to reach areas, including rural and underserved communities. Gillibrand and Murkowski are calling for the inclusion of the Summer Meals Act in the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization currently being negotiated by the Senate Agriculture Committee.

“Learning disruptions caused by the pandemic have deepened the hunger crisis for vulnerable children who rely on school meals to keep from going hungry. When schools are out for the summer, we must guarantee that food insecure students maintain access to nutritious food,” said Senator Gillibrand. “This legislation will provide more children with a reliable source of meals when schools are closed and deliver critical resources to help schools and nonprofits to administer these programs. With summer quickly approaching, I urge my colleagues to join Senator Murkowski and me to pass this important legislation so that every student has the opportunity to grow healthy and strong.”



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