



# Sullivan County

## Veterans Committee

### Meeting Agenda - Final

100 North Street  
Monticello, NY 12701

Chairman Luis Alvarez  
Vice Chairman Nicholas Salomone Jr.  
Committee Member Terry Blosser-Bernardo  
Committee Member Catherine Scott  
Committee Member Matt McPhillips

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**Thursday, June 5, 2025**

**12:00 PM**

**Government Center**

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1. **Call To Order and Pledge of Allegiance**
2. **Roll Call**
3. **Opening Remarks: Luis Alvarez, Chairman**
4. **Commanders' Reports: Veterans Service Organizations**
5. **Veterans Service Agency - Director's Report**
6. **Discussion:**
7. **Public Comment**
8. **Resolutions: None**
9. **Adjourn**

[ID-7509](#)

# Sullivan County

## Legislative Memorandum

File #: ID-7509

Agenda Date: 6/5/2025

Agenda #: 5.

### VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY REPORT

June 5, 2025 - 12:00 PM

#### Director's Report

- *Local Activities*
  - Our Administrative Assistant April Barschow has achieved accreditation by the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, to provide a wider range of services to our local veterans and surviving spouses.
  - On April 29<sup>th</sup>, VSO Zack Jones attended the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor unveiling their new Veterans Welcome Kiosk in New Windsor. Zack was able to meet and network with Directors and VSOs from almost every county in the State to discuss challenges resulting from recent VA policy change.
  - On five separate dates in April and May, our Clerk Sheldon Dillon assisted Sharon Ferber at the Community Assistance Center to distribute pallets of food.
  - On May 13<sup>th</sup>, I met with David Potash, President of SCCC and Stacey Johnson, Dean of Students to establish a resource guide to assist veteran students in obtaining benefits and services within the VA and local community. Our Clerk Sheldon Dillon did a fantastic job obtaining contact information to assist with any situation the students may encounter.
  - On May 16<sup>th</sup>, Senior VSO Joe Putnam attended the Vet 2 Vet 'Reel Bonds' veterans fishing event at Hanofee Park in Liberty. Joe made contact with veterans in need of services and was able to assist them.
  - On May 17<sup>th</sup>, I attended the New York State Elks Association Annual Convention at the Villa Roma Resort. We discussed annual programs for veterans to include the Honor Flight and the Camp Bristol retreat. A workshop provided by Fred Sganga, Executive Director of the Stony Brook NY State Veterans Home covered programs offered at that facility. There are currently 5 State Veterans Homes operating in New York. A 70% or higher disabled veteran pays no fee for long term nursing home care. The spouse of an honorably discharged veteran that served at least 90 days of wartime service is also eligible for long term care. Other topics covered were expanded pension with Aid and Attendance and payment through Medicaid and Medicare or self-pay. The State Veterans Home services and programs are too extensive to cover in the time we have available, please let me know if anyone would like

further information on this long-term care option for our vets.

- On May 20<sup>th</sup>, I attended the drug pillar meeting along with ATI, Vet 2 Vet staff, VA Mental Health, and Camille O'Brien, Department of Community Services Drug Task Force Coordinator. Our discussion revealed that Veterans involved with the treatment court would also benefit from the resource guide our office created.
- Our office has continued to conduct wellness checks for elderly veterans and those suffering from food insecurity within the community.
- The Vet 2 Vet program Coffee and Camaraderie at ATI brings local vets together every Monday at 10:00 am which Zack Jones, Joe Putnam and I take turns attending each week. At our last meeting, a local vet came in for a cup of coffee and revealed he was homeless, in need of food and needed his car repaired. Within a few hours, Matt and Vinny from Vet 2 Vet and Joel Murns, Vet Center Outreach Coordinator were able to arrange car repairs and HUD VASH VA housing assistance. I assisted the veteran with food supplied by the Sullivan County Community Assistance Center. Our office is currently engaged in pursuing any benefits the veteran is eligible to receive.
- Our Annual VSO training provided by the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers is scheduled for July 14<sup>th</sup> - July 18<sup>th</sup> and will be attended virtually.

■ *VA & PACT Act Updates*

- The new Administration has appointed former US Representative Doug Collins (R-GA) as Secretary of the VA. The Secretary claims that although the administration's goal is to cut over 70,000 more employees from the VBA and VHA he has stated that there will always be VA facilities to provide medical care and the goal is not to privatize or move all veterans to community care.
- The current administration plans to cut more VA employees that work in VHA and the office that investigates disparities in Veterans' care. Many of our clients have been advised of excessive wait times for health care appointments. We have reported the disruption to our national commanders as well as the concerns of our local veterans.

■ *The Good News*

- Senate VA Committee leaders Mark Takano and ranking member Richard Blumenthal have unveiled a sweeping veterans Bill aimed at reversing damage from the current administration's egregious cuts at VA. This bill's current status is "INTRODUCED" and must now pass the Senate, House and be signed by the President.
- I have contacted our newly elected State Assembly and Congressional representatives to open lines of communication between VA liaisons and assist our County veterans with more complicated needs. Paula Kay along with other representatives in the Assembly and Senate are working on a bill to streamline the communication between veteran service agencies offering everything from in-home care to counselling.

- The new bill 2025-A7627A has passed the Assembly and now seeks approval by state Senate before consideration by the Governor
- We have continued strong advocacy for surviving spouses and veterans within our county. VSO's Zack Jones and Joseph Putnam have achieved a high success rate on claims and appeals awarding the highest possible ratings and retroactive payment.

## VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY REPORT

June 5, 2025 - 12:00 PM

### 1. Veterans referred to Sullivan County Transportation for VA Medical Appointments:

	<u>Albany</u>	<u>Castle Point</u>	<u>Local</u>
March	3	42	35
April	4	45	34

### 2. Veterans/Dependents buried in Sullivan County Veterans Cemetery through May 30, 2025:

Veterans Buried Alone . . . . . 1,174

Dependents . . . . . 145

Veterans/Spouses . . . . . 680

**Total Burials in Veterans Cemetery - 1,999                    (+23 since Dec. 2024)**

### 3. Contacts:

March	290
April	241

### 4. Applications:

March	9
April	13

### 5. Homeless Veterans:

March	1
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April 0

**6. New Veterans**

March 4

April 4

**7. Phone Calls**

March 753

April 708