The Veterans Defense Program During the Pandemic

The Veterans Defense Program (VDP) and its staff, not unlike other programs and people, have faced significant challenges during the extraordinary year of 2020. Veterans, especially those suffering the mental health consequences of their service, including Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and clinical depression, are especially hard hit in these times.

It was imperative that the VDP function at full capability under unprecedented conditions to continue to address the critical needs of veterans in the justice system. Since March 2020, the VDP maintained all staff at their regular hours, in all three office locations, through a combination of remote working and reduced office presence. No requests for service or assistance were rejected.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to continue in-person Continuing Legal Education (CLE) trainings and educational presentations. Instead, through the auspices of our parent organization, the New York State Defenders Association, as well as the New York State Bar Association, the VDP presented CLE programs in webinar format on various topics concerning veteran representation in the justice system.

Another serious problem is that it appears state funding has been substantially less than approved and budgeted for in the 2020/2021 State Budget, due to the financial difficulties the State faces resulting from the pandemic, and the lack of emergency federal aid to states and localities. It is hoped that these issues can be resolved before the continued existence of the VDP becomes impossible.

Overall, the VDP has continued our activities, hardly missing a beat, to provide much needed services to veterans and their defense counsel in New York State, despite the pandemic and a financial crisis.

This report covers the VDP activities from 10/1/2019 to 12/1/2020.

The Veterans Defense Program 2020 Report front and back cover is the signature red and gold colors of the United States Marine Corps.
New York State Defenders Association
Veterans Defense Program
2020 Report

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Mission Statement

The Veterans Defense Program provides training, support, and legal assistance to promote trauma-informed, client-centered representation of veterans and service members who are suffering from the invisible wounds of war, and become involved in New York State's criminal and family court systems.
# Veterans Defense Program
## 2020 Report

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*Names have been changed for privacy protection, and photos are representative of the veterans the VDP assists.
Introduction to the Veterans Defense Program
Defending Those Who Defended Us

The Veterans Defense Program (VDP) provides training, support, and legal assistance to promote trauma-informed effective representation of veterans and service members in New York State’s criminal and family court systems. The first of its kind in the nation, the VDP was launched in response to a growing crisis in the number of veterans with service-related mental health illnesses who were lost in the criminal justice system.

Promoting Justice and Fairness
The Veterans Defense Program is a project of the New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA), a statewide non-profit organization working to improve the quality and scope of publicly supported legal representation for people who cannot afford a lawyer.

Intersection of Military Service, Mental Health, and Criminal Justice
Military service in general can exact a toll on a person’s physical and mental health, and the “unseen wounds” suffered during the intense conditions of combat and multiple, lengthy deployments can be severe. Studies report that depressive disorders, substance abuse, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) among New York State veterans are at epidemic proportions. Of the 718,000 Vietnam, Gulf, and Post-9/11 veterans in the state, approximately 215,670 are estimated to have PTSD, TBI, or depression. Studies show up to 50% of those veterans are untreated. (Sources: Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological & Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences & Services to Assist Recovery, RAND Corporation, 2008; Veterans & Health in NYS, NYS Health Foundation, 2017.)

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the National Academy of Medicine report that veterans with mental health conditions are at significant risk of arrest as their trauma symptoms may lead them to criminal conduct. PTSD and TBI are linked to incarceration, antisocial behavior, and violence among veterans. The VA found the association between PTSD and violence is especially strong among post-9/11 veterans.

Attorney Brock Hunter, a recognized national expert on veteran defense, summarized the situation, saying, “We are fighting wars on the backs of volunteers and a smaller military and we recycle the same troops back over and over, with many tours of duty. PTSD rates climb with each additional tour. The military culture is one of service and sacrifice: you deal with your problems privately and don’t complain or ask for help. Vets are badly treated and ignored in the criminal justice system. We need to give veterans support when they fall, particularly when they fall into the criminal justice system.”

“Left untreated, the emotional wounds of war can have a dramatic and destructive impact on veterans,” said Melissa Fitzgerald, Senior Director of the national Justice for Vets. “If we don’t intervene at the critical point of arrest, we risk losing veterans to the system forever. We can hold accountable veterans who commit crimes while connecting them to the benefits and treatments they have earned. Men and women who, instead of languishing behind bars, are going back to school, working, raising children, and living as civic assets. Veterans have fought for our freedom—shouldn’t we fight for theirs?”

VDP Case Manager Juan Sosa, while a Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army Reserve, serving with the 773rd Transportation Company at Mosul, Iraq, in 2006
Justice-involved veterans often do not have the funds to hire an attorney and are represented by public defenders. Public defense attorneys are rarely trained to adequately represent veterans who suffer from the invisible wounds of war, or to translate the combat experience of their clients to explain resulting criminal behavior. Approximately 7% of Americans are veterans. Thus, it is unlikely that judges, attorneys, and jurors are veterans who understand the military experience.

Defense attorneys need to be educated as to the critical impact of military culture on justice-involved veterans. The modern battlefield conditions require a soldier to be alert and ready for an attack that could come at any moment, from any direction, from any person. To prepare for this environment, the military trains individuals to become warriors, to “move, shoot, and communicate” as members of a team, instinctively, even when that requires them to put their own lives in danger. The attitudes and instincts that may equate to success in the military—or simply survival—often make reintegration into civilian life extremely difficult without help, and exponentially more so when that person has experienced trauma during military service. Defenders need to understand how a client’s military experience and health issues impact their cases at every stage of representation and gain insight into how their mental health conditions affect them.

Significant progress has been made with the advent of Veterans Treatment Courts to provide a therapeutic health-based approach to respond to the mental health crisis among justice-involved veterans. However, New York has Veterans Treatment Courts in only 31 City, County, or Supreme Courts, and most accept only a small percentage of cases, usually limited to misdemeanors and in some courts, non-violent felonies. (Veterans Courts, New York State Unified Court System [as of April 2019], http://www2.nycourts.gov/courts/problem_solving/vet/courts.shtml). Veterans with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system—the most vulnerable of our returning warriors—deserve an alternative resolution process with treatment and rehabilitation. Incarcerating veterans for medium-level crimes, such as assault and burglary, when mental health treatment is needed and available, closes the door to substantial opportunities for healing, family restoration, and becoming a productive member of society. An alternative treatment track for veterans whose crimes stem from service-related injuries is strongly supported by many veteran organizations, including the Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America and the New York State Council of Veterans Organizations.

Defense attorneys need to be zealous advocates for therapeutic justice on behalf of their veteran clients and trained strategists in dealing with their clients’ mental health conditions with sensitivity. They need to understand that they are functioning as therapeutic agents in their interactions with their clients, particularly in the plea and sentencing process. However, to accomplish this, understaffed and overburdened public defenders need the support services of a resource center. A statewide analysis found the vast majority of public defenders were only able to spend an average of four hours on a case: from arraignment, to motion filing, to court appearances, to visiting clients in jail, to pre-trial hearings, to disposition and sentencing. (NYSDA 2014 Memorandum on Caseload Calculations.)

**Legal Support Services for Justice-Involved Veterans**

Staffed by award-winning attorneys with deep experience working with veterans, the VDP is committed to giving veterans access to the best possible legal representation. Veterans with battle-borne illnesses need treatment and an alternative resolution process in the criminal justice system. The VDP attorneys provide innovative and case-specific legal assistance, including mitigation, records retrieval, resources, mentoring, and consultation in criminal and family court veteran cases.

Even after twenty years of our military being actively involved in combat, and the media highlighting the difficulty some veterans have in reintegrating into their communities, it remains a struggle to have many of our courts recognize veteran trauma and assist in providing veterans the support they need to obtain treatment and overcome the effects of their military service. Many of our veterans experience more trauma in one day in combat than the rest of us experience in a lifetime. War means witnessing violence and death of fellow soldiers and civilian collateral deaths and the daily exposure to the risk of harm does not leave one unscathed. The results of these experiences are PTSD, clinical depression, and substance abuse, and are at the core of their involvement in the criminal justice system. The vision of the VDP is that every
justice-involved veteran receives specialized legal representation from an attorney who understands their military experience and culture, the effects of those experiences, and who can present this information to the court in support of therapeutic outcomes.

The VDP advises public defense attorneys on military culture and its impact on their veteran clients’ service-related mental health issues, and client-centered legal approaches that focus on treatment and sentencing mitigation. The VDP assists attorneys during every step of a case, from pre-trial motions to sentencing and re-entry. The VDP attorneys conduct in-depth research and interviews, make court presentations, help defenders obtain military or medical experts, and write Mitigation Memoranda and other legal documents.

Training Programs and Peer-to-Peer Veteran Mentoring
The VDP attorneys conduct trainings across the state for hundreds of public defense attorneys and also present to bar associations, government agencies, and veteran organizations. The VDP trainings receive excellent reviews. Because NYSDA is an Accredited Provider of Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (CLE), the VDP programs often provide CLE credit to attorney attendees.

The VDP Veteran Peer-to-Peer Mentors provide counseling, support, and expert referrals to help hundreds of veteran clients annually access treatment and address legal, health, benefits, social services, housing, employment, and other issues.

The following statements from two veterans exemplifies the life-changing work of the VDP.

“The NYSDA VDP has always had my back, and has never let me down or left me alone. My one regret is that more veterans in New York State don’t know or have access to this program.”
Douglas LaMendola, U. S. Marine Corps Military Police

“If it wasn’t for the VDP, I would be rotting in a 6 x 8 cell. Your program was there when I needed it the most and I am indebted to you.”
U.S. Army Infantryman

VDP Deputy Director Roy Diehl, while a Captain, U.S. Army, in Kuwait preparing to deploy into Iraq in 2005
In 2020, in the cases in which the VDP provided assistance, the VDP identified:

- PTSD in 44% of veteran cases;
- Mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, in 34% of veteran cases; and
- Military sexual trauma in 7% of veteran cases.

VDP Case Manager Richard Henry with his company, while a Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps, at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in 2015
**LEGAL SERVICES**
- Assist Attorneys in Collecting and Interpreting Military and VA Records
- Case Consultations
- Veteran Mitigation Memoranda & Motions

**TREATMENT**
Connect Veteran with PTSD, TBI, Depression & Substance Abuse Treatment.

**PRISON ASSISTANCE**
Assist with Letters of Commitment, VA Disability Forms, Time Credit Issues, 440 Motions, Entry or Re-Entry Mentoring.

**MENTORING & REFERRALS**
Provide Veteran Peer-to-Peer Mentoring, and Referrals & Guidance on Family & Civil Issues.

**VA BENEFITS COORDINATION**
Coordinate Services & Communication with the VA Veterans’ Justice Officers & Veteran Service Officers on Veterans’ Benefits.

**ACTIVE DUTY & RESERVES**
Advocate with the Soldier’s Command and JAG Officers for Retention, or Favorable Discharge in the Event of a Separation Board Proceeding.

**TRAINING & ASSISTANCE FOR ATTORNEYS**
Train, Advise & Assist Defense Attorneys to Effectively Represent Justice-Involved Veteran Defendants.
Summary of Veterans Defense Program Activities & Accomplishments in 2020

• The VDP provided legal and technical assistance, and peer-to-peer mentoring to 216 veterans in 43 counties.

• The VDP helped hundreds of justice-involved veterans to be diverted into treatment and probation, avoiding hundreds of years of incarceration with a cost savings to the State of up to $83 million over the last five years.

• The VDP legal trainings, education, and outreach benefited over 1,800 people.

Impact of Pandemic on Justice-Involved Veterans, the Courts, and Government

As difficult as the pandemic was functionally for the VDP, this year has been even more challenging for veterans suffering from PTSD, clinical depression, and other mental health diagnoses where anxiety is symptomatic. The pandemic caused shut downs at Department of Defense (DoD) record repositories, Veteran Health Administration Residential Treatment Centers, and the criminal courts, causing unprecedented delays in the disposition of even routine cases.

These cumulative delays exponentially intensified anxiety among veterans involved in the justice system. Each of the factors multiplied the difficulty of the next. Delayed military records hindered delivery of mitigation to the judges, who were reluctant to order alternatives to incarceration in the absence of a mitigation report. Even for those veterans who were ordered to Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) or residential treatment before the COVID-19 epidemic, the shutdown of courts and treatment facilities substantially delayed dispositions.

Participants in the VTCs were particularly hard hit as they rely on the supervision and support of regular appearances before the court to foster success. VTC participants depend on the peer-to-peer support provided by Veteran Mentors. When virtual appearances did take place, such appearances were unable to replicate the human connections and support that exist between all those who are usually present during those proceedings. The length of time participants have to spend in VTCs has at least doubled. These delays have also created additional workload for the VDP staff to mentor veterans who had an understandably difficult time coping with the delays. The VDP staff also had to deal with attorneys whose offices were closed and were difficult to reach. With cases being open much longer than usual and the regular influx of new cases never diminishing, our workload actually increased under difficult conditions. These delays in disposition of cases also directly impacted the metrics typically provided in our reports, such as the cost of days saved from unnecessary incarceration, since sentencing was delayed for 52 cases this year.

Assistance Provided in 216 Veteran Cases in 43 Counties

The VDP served as a backup resource and support program for attorneys in more than 120 county-based public defender offices, legal aid societies, and assigned counsel programs, and for individual veterans and their families. The VDP’s assistance provided a second chance for veterans who have lost their way, and facilitated a treatment-oriented mitigation approach focusing on restoration and rehabilitation. In 2020, the VDP had cases in 43 of the 62 counties in New York State. The following is a summary of the assistance that VDP attorneys and program staff provided to justice-involved veterans and their defense attorneys.
Veterans Defense Program

Legal Assistance in 116 Cases with Many Veterans Receiving Treatment & Probation
The VDP attorneys provided substantial assistance to defense counsel representing veterans in 116 cases. The VDP’s zealous representation resulted in case victories where veterans were saved from incarceration, provided leniency by the court, and sentenced to probation and treatment to address their mental health conditions and/or substance abuse. The VDP conducted veteran client interviews, appeared in court as co-counsel, and drafted legal documents, such as Mitigation Memoranda, Criminal Procedure Law Article 440 Motions, Bail Release Memoranda, and Motions to Dismiss in the Interest of Justice. The VDP has 52 open cases from across the state that have been open for a year or more. This is an exceptional period of time, due to substantial court delays during the pandemic.

Mentoring and Assistance in 100 Cases Provide Veterans with Support & Treatment
The VDP provided legal assistance to defense counsel representing veterans in 100 cases, providing advice on how to obtain military and VA records, and assistance with expert referrals, including military culture and medical experts. The VDP also holistically assisted veterans and their families by providing mentoring, facilitating treatment and benefits, and addressing homelessness, among other issues. The VDP also facilitated placement for these veterans in Level III Incarcerated Veteran Programs in the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). Located in four facilities, these programs offer Veteran Dorms with mental health counseling and peer-to-peer veteran mentoring.
VDP Legal Trainings, Educational Presentations & Outreach Benefited Over 1,800 People

The VDP conducted 27 trainings, educational presentations, and outreach at events and online webinars informing hundreds of attorneys representing veteran clients. The trainings often provided Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits for attorneys and received excellent reviews. The VDP gave educational presentations to attorneys, veterans, and legal organizations working on public defense, criminal justice, and veteran issues, at programs sponsored by organizations such as the NYS Bar Association and the NYS Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. It also provided education, resources, helpful publications, and staff contacts to over 1,370 users through its updated website at https://www.nysda.org/page/VDPWelcome. The following statements from participants attest to the quality of the VDP trainings and presentations.

“I wanted to say I truly enjoyed your NYSDA Veterans Defense presentation a few weeks ago. It was very insightful and helpful and I appreciate it!”
Meaghan Speedling, Deputy Public Defender, Albany County Office of the Public Defender, Albany, NY.

“I have attended some of Gary Horton’s presentations in Rochester in the past. I learned so much from Gary’s CLEs. He explained military culture, the different ranks, how to express gratitude to veterans. Having that knowledge has helped me in my interactions with my clients. I only do appellate work, but this information has made a huge difference in establishing rapport with my veteran clients. Sadly, it’s usually the first time in the legal system that my clients have ever had their military service acknowledged by anyone. Bottom line, I think the VDP is great!”
Cara A. Waldman, Esq., Fairport, NY.

I think the VDP is great!

VDP Case Manager Michael White, while a Lance Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps, at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in 2002
VDP’s Treatment-Oriented Mitigation Approach Places Veterans on the Road to Recovery, While Saving the State Up to $83 Million in Incarceration Expenses*

In five years, the VDP helped justice-involved veterans to be diverted into treatment and probation, and avoided hundreds of years of incarceration with a cost saving to the State of up to $83 million.

*The cost saving is calculated by taking the maximum number of incarceration years for the original charge and subtracting the number of years imposed in sentencing. The cost of incarcerating a prisoner for a year in New York State is $60,000. (NYS Assembly Committee on Correction Report, December 2018, https://nyassembly.gov/write/upload/postings/2019/pdfs/20190319_0085751.pdf).

*According to the U.S. Veterans Administration, the Cold War generally refers to the period of tension between the U.S. and its allies with the Soviet bloc from the end of World War II in 1945 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. https://www.va.gov/OAA/pocketcard/m-coldwar.asp.
Veterans Defense Program Supporters

An Invaluable Service for Veterans

The VDP is supported by over 70 veteran, legal, and mental health organizations, including the American Legion; AMVETS; Chief Defenders Association of New York; Disabled American Veterans; Marine Corps League; Military Order of the Purple Heart; National Alliance for Mental Illness-NYS; NYS Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers; NYS Council of Veterans Organizations; United War Veterans Council; Veterans of Foreign Wars; and a majority of county public defense programs, such as Brooklyn Defender Services, The Bronx Defenders, the Legal Aid Societies of Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties, Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, The Legal Aid Society, and Allegany, Chemung, Monroe, Oneida, Ontario, St. Lawrence, Ulster, and Wyoming County Public Defender offices.

What Veterans, Organizations, and the Legal Community Are Saying About the VDP

“Courts judged me by my race, gender and potential earning to the point I could no longer afford legal help and life’s necessities. The VDP has always had my back, and has never let me down or left me alone. Please allow this program to continue to be a beacon in a confusing world for vets.”

Douglas LaMendola, U.S. Marine Corps Military Police.

“To the Esteemed Members of the Legislature:
I humbly write to you as a disabled veteran who has run into uphill legal battles over the past 10 years. Courts judged me by my race, gender and potential earning to the point I could no longer afford legal help and life’s necessities. Nobody was willing to help, and I kept hearing the words ‘we can’t help you’ to the point I was afraid of losing my home. Then, 10 years ago, I stumbled across Deanne Miller and Gary Horton of the VDP by dumb luck. This forever changed my life. Not once was I told that they could not help. Ms. Miller listened patiently to my legal issues and would sometimes conference with Mr. Horton to assess resources available for me. I am sure that I have tested their abilities, cost them favors, and given them headaches, but they have always given me their best.

The VDP has always had my back, and has never let me down or left me alone. My one regret is that more veterans in New York State don’t know or have access to this program. I beg you to continue to support this program, and to grow and nurture it so that more veterans like myself can be saved. Without this program, I can’t say for sure that I would still be here. Please allow this program to continue to be a beacon in a confusing world for vets.” Douglas LaMendola, U.S. Marine Corps Military Police.
“Dear Ms. Cassidy, I would like to take a moment to pass along my gratitude to you for the 440 motion to vacate the conviction which you did for me. I thank you for doing a phenomenal job on the motion, which clearly demonstrated that you are a very adept attorney. You went beyond hitting all the points of concern, and then some. I thank you for all your time and the hard work that you put into my case. Also, for your patience in dealing with me, as I know that I can be a bit impatient. Thank you so much.”

_U.S. Army Infantryman, Upstate Correctional Facility._

“Dear VDP Director Horton, I cannot express enough my deep appreciation and gratitude for your help with my case. You and your organization were the last glimmer of hope for me after a plea-bargaining sentence of 4 years in prison for weapon possession. Your cool and calm professionalism during our first consultation gave me confidence in my legal representation after two disappointing paid attorneys. As I stood before the Judge, there was a change in his demeanor and I knew immediately that a miracle was going to take place. He opened up by stating that he received the information, and was quite impressed with my military records and letters of character. As the result of your description of my true character, the Judge reduced my sentence to a just punishment of 5 years’ probation. If it wasn’t for the VDP, I would be rotting in a 6x8 cell. Your program was there when I needed it the most and I am indebted to you.”

_U.S. Army Infantryman._

“I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Gary Horton, Dee Miller, and ALL of those involved with the VDP. Although we were not made aware of this program until after our son went through the criminal court system, they have been hugely instrumental in our son’s care. The VDP has our deepest, and most sincere, gratitude for being solely responsible for his placement in the Groveland Correctional Facility, where he now resides in the Honor Veteran’s Dorm. However, it was a long road for him to be placed there. Initially, our son was sent to Greene Correctional Facility. We knew this was not where he was supposed to be. (He should NOT be in any correctional facility!) I immediately contacted Dee and Mr. Horton. They jumped in and quickly had the transfer orders in place. If it were not for their deep concern for our son, and his well-being, I’m not sure where he would be today. Before arriving at Groveland, he was transported to numerous facilities in New York State.

During his multiple transfers, his hearing aids were misplaced/lost. Once again, I contacted the VDP. Phone calls and email correspondence were exchanged and, shortly thereafter, he was able to see the medical personnel at Groveland and regained hearing aids. He has been wearing hearing aids, in both ears, since his service in the USMC. As a U.S. Navy Veteran’s wife, and the mother of two U. S. Marine Corps veterans, I am greatly saddened that we were not made aware of this program prior to my son’s incident and going through the criminal court system. Veterans are unique individuals. Each has served our great country, making huge sacrifices, with honor and pride. However, now that we know about this outstanding program, we will be eternally grateful for everything they have done, and everything they continue to do for our son and our family. The care, compassion, and professionalism of the VDP is remarkable and should be duly noted. With sincere gratitude.” _Lisa Maharrey_
“Mr. Henry’s overview of the records was the single most helpful document I received to help me prepare Arnie’s application. On December 24, 2020, Governor Cuomo granted Arnie’s application for clemency and specifically cited Arnie’s service in Vietnam as a reason he granted clemency. Arnie, his family, and myself are so grateful for the VDP.”

VDP Director Gary Horton commends a veteran client at the Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court

“Dear Ms. Cassidy, We appeared in county court today for sentencing. We highlighted some of the issues you had raised, and we thank you for your great contribution. The Judge gave her 3 years’ probation and 250 hours of community service. So that is good news. Thank you.”
Attorney Michael O’Keefe, Medina, NY.

“Dear VDP Deputy Director Diehl, There are not enough words to say thank you for the work you have put in on this case, on all the cases of the VDP, and for your extensive military service for our country. Thank you! The mitigation letter you wrote is excellent. I will talk to my client and with his permission, I will provide it to the Judge and the Assistant District Attorney in an effort to get the best resolution. Thank you again for everything. I truly appreciate it!”
Meaghan Speedling, Deputy Public Defender, Albany County Office of the Public Defender, Albany, NY.

“Good afternoon Ms. Cassidy, My veteran client’s offer has been improved to a plea on a misdemeanor with 3 years’ probation. My client was thrilled to avoid the felony plea, and hopes that he has finally gotten his life on track. Thank you so much for your assistance. Your report was incredibly helpful in securing this disposition. The assigned Assistant District Attorney was very impressed with the mitigation letter and it helped her feel comfortable with the improved disposition.”
Alyssa Dwyer, First Assistant Public Defender, Oneida County Public Defender’s Office, Utica, NY.

“Dear VDP Deputy Director Diehl, Thanks for all of your help. You have really gone above and beyond on my veteran client’s case.”
Lawrence King, Senior Assistant Public Defender, Dutchess County Office of the Public Defender, Poughkeepsie, NY.
“I created the nation’s first Veterans Treatment Court in Buffalo, NY, to address the unique needs of veterans especially those suffering from the invisible wounds of war, such as PTSD, TBI, military sexual trauma and major depression. I am writing in support of the VDP as the program is filling a critical gap in New York’s criminal justice system by training and educating public defense attorneys to effectively represent wounded warriors charged with a criminal offense, and to facilitate mitigation, treatment and restoration. I commend the VDP for its important work in helping justice-involved veterans regain their status as productive members of society.”

Honorable Judge Robert T. Russell, Jr., City Court Judge, Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court, NY.

“During my year as a visiting professor and supervising clinical attorney at CUNY School of Law, I had the honor of working with Deanne Quinn Miller and Richard Henry of the VDP. Together, we assisted 70 year-old Arnold “Arnie” Raimondo - who is serving the 39th year of his 50 to life sentence - in submitting a clemency application to Governor Cuomo. Arnie served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam. Ms. Miller and Mr. Henry obtained military records and provided me with much-needed assistance in understanding Arnie’s military experience. Mr. Henry’s overview of the records was the single most helpful document I received to help me prepare Arnie’s application. On December 24, 2020, Governor Cuomo granted Arnie’s application for clemency and specifically cited Arnie’s service in Vietnam as a reason he granted clemency. Arnie, his family, and myself are so grateful for the VDP.”

Barbara Ho, Staff Attorney, The Legal Aid Society, Kew Gardens, NY.

“Thank you so much for your assistance.
Your report was incredibly helpful in securing this disposition. The assigned Assistant District Attorney was very impressed with the mitigation letter.”

“We just received a new client who recently retired from the military. He served 20 years and now is partially disabled due to PTSD. I was hoping the VDP would help me convince the District Attorney that drug court would be appropriate for him, instead of jail time, with one of those amazing mitigation memos. He is willing to do inpatient treatment with the VA, but needs some help navigating the process. Thank you.”

Zach Halperin, Staff Attorney, Greene County Public Defender’s Office, Catskill, NY.
“Dear VDP Deputy Director Diehl, I am lucky and grateful to have you as a resource for our clients. Thank you for everything that you do! I spoke to my client on Friday. It seems like he’s having a rougher summer than most and it is tragic. I am happy that he is now stabilized at the VA and got help there when he needed it. Thanks again.”

*Meaghan Speedling, Deputy Public Defender, Albany County Office of the Public Defender, Albany, NY.*

“Thanks for all of your help. You have really gone above and beyond on my veteran client’s case.”

“Thank you so much for your help in gathering documents, connecting us with available resources, and aiding in my negotiations with the Manhattan District Attorney’s office. My client wanted me to extend his gratitude as well. He has successfully completed his treatment program, and the case was resolved with no criminal record. He is now doing college classes and has started up his own business. He continues to receive mental health treatment from the VA.

Over the last two years, he was able to get the family court to give him permission to see his children, and now has custody of them on weekends. It goes to show what second chances and quality mental health treatment can do for someone. Thanks again for your help. This heavy lift could not have happened without your assistance.”

*Michelle McGrath, Staff Attorney, Legal Aid Society, New York, NY.*

*Veteran names were changed to protect their privacy.*
(L-R) Judge Robert Russell, Buffalo Veteran Treatment Court; Vincent Schillaci, VA Veterans Justice Outreach; and Gary Horton, VDP Director at a New York City session on the Enhancing Court Services for Veterans Initiative Series by the Unified Court System and the Center for Court Innovation.

The Veterans Defense Program

Process

- Intake Interview
- Conduct In-depth Interview with Veteran Defendant
- Coordinate & Confirm VA Treatment for PTSD, TBI, and/or Depression
- Investigate Military Background, Request Records
- Coordinate & Confirm Substance Abuse Treatment
- Seek Therapeutic Alternatives to Incarceration
- Write Mitigation Memos & Motions for the Court
- Restoration to Family & Community
The Veterans Defense Program
Write Mitigation Memos & Motions for the Court
Restoration to Family & Community
Seek Therapeutic Alternatives to Incarceration
Coordinate & Confirm VA Treatment for PTSD, TBI, and/or Depression
Conduct In-depth Interview with Veteran Defendant
Investigate Military Background, Request Records

Intake Interview Coordinate & Confirm Substance Abuse Treatment

Airman First Class (A1C) John Vito*

John Vito, a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, had a picture-perfect childhood that masked his unspoken traumatic past filled with abuse. This Oneida County veteran entered the military as a Weapons Load Crew member responsible for the overall readiness of an immediate worldwide deployment of the squadron’s war reserve material. He met his duty with diligence, cutting tank transport time by 50%. His enthusiasm and dedication were recognized, and he became an excellent custodian of military equipment worth around $2.6 million.

He was then deployed in Operation Southern Watch where he was tasked with loading bombs onto the F-16 Fighting Falcon. He worked under near constant airstrikes that continued for four months in temperatures that reached 114 degrees. The stress was overwhelming, and he began to self-medicate by drinking heavily.

After an Honorable Discharge from a military career in which he was recognized as “dedicated” and a “key player,” he began to spiral downward into alcohol and drugs, eventually resulting in a felony DWI charge. His lawyer contacted the VDP for help. A Mitigation Memorandum was prepared and presented to persuade the court of this soldier’s worthy past and the need to take a treatment oriented approach. The court recognized his service, his severe trauma, and his need for treatment. The court reduced his felony charge to a misdemeanor with a requirement that he complete treatment for substance abuse. His attorney wrote the VDP after his sentencing:

“He was thrilled to avoid the felony plea and hopes that he has finally gotten his life on track. Thank you so much for your assistance. The assigned Assistant District Attorney was very impressed with the mitigation memoranda and it helped her feel comfortable with the improvement in disposition.”

Alyssa Dwyer, First Assistant Public Defender, Oneida County Public Defender’s Office, Utica, NY.
Towards the end of his enlistment, he was sent to the Persian Gulf on a mission to recover and repair hundreds of trucks that had been used in Iraq and Afghanistan, including some damaged in roadside bombings. He then returned to the base in North Dakota, married his girlfriend from New York, and went home—transferring into the Air Force Reserve to continue his service. Here, too, his service was recognized as he commuted from the Hudson Valley all the way to Niagara Falls every month for a weekend of military duties. However, after four years of this service, the demands of home life and his civilian job led him to leave the service.

It was only at this point, though, that he began to feel the effects of his deployment. While in Qatar, he had repaired vehicles that were still stained with the blood of the soldiers who had been inside when bombed. At the same time, he was also aware that several of his friends from North Dakota had been sent to serve as drivers in Afghanistan. While he had been in relative safety, his friends were at risk of exactly the same kind of attack as the people in the trucks he had repaired. Now, half a decade later, he was suffering from “hidden wounds” of survivor guilt, no different and just as intense as anyone else might feel from service in war. He began to self-medicate, with alcohol at first, and then with other drugs, a habit that sadly led to a charge of grand larceny. This tragic turn of events forced him to break the cycle by seeking professional assistance.

His attorney contacted the VDP and asked for help in summarizing Rivera’s service to help the prosecution and the court see him as someone who deserved their respect and full consideration for the circumstances that led to his arrest and charge. Based in large part on the VDP’s Mitigation Memorandum that summarized his service and trauma, fully supported by military records, his defense counsel negotiated a plea of guilty to the felony charge, with a reduction to a misdemeanor and a conditional discharge upon successful completion of a year of interim probation and treatment.

Rather than punishing the offense, the VDP assisted the client’s attorney to have the court see him as a person, and see the story behind his criminal charge—events from his service and the wounds to his psyche suffered in the line of duty. The sentencing acknowledged the facts of the case, and supported the veteran as he works to recover his dignity and his health.
Veteran Receives Fairer Sentence for Firearm Accident

U.S. Army Sergeant (Sgt.) Tony Aiello*
Tony Aiello, a resident of Onondaga County, enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1980 and served a total of 9 years and 3 months. His service spanned a period of time containing the Cold War, the Iran Hostage Crisis, increased tension throughout the Persian Gulf, and the invasion of Panama. He enlisted as a Combat Infantryman and during his two enlistments he served in Germany, Korea, and the Philippines.

During his years of service, he was promoted through the enlisted ranks to Sergeant, becoming a Non-Commissioned Officer, known as the “backbone of the Army.” He received three Army Achievement Medals among many other awards. Throughout his service he received above average evaluations from his chain of command. Although his enlistment contracts called for eight years’ service, he was held over an additional fifteen months for the “convenience of the service.” In September of 1989, he was Honorably Discharged.

In civilian life, he spent many years as a productive and law abiding member of his community. He has been a member of the Electricians Union since 1993, and he served as the primary caretaker for his elderly parents. This exemplary soldier’s life took a terrible turn when he wounded both himself and his brother in an accidental discharge of a firearm. His brother held no malice toward him; he absolutely felt the discharge of the weapon was completely accidental. He chose to not press charges, and opposed any mandatory incarceration for his brother. Despite those facts, Aiello was charged with second-degree criminal possession of a weapon, and on the advice of counsel entered a plea conditioned on a 3½ year state prison sentence. He then contacted the VDP, less than 45 days from when his sentencing was scheduled. Although his counsel discouraged any mitigation efforts as he felt the outcome was preordained, the VDP prepared a Mitigation Memorandum in a short time frame, and it was filed with the court.

The veteran described in his own words what occurred when he appeared for sentencing:
“My attorney received your presentation on time and forwarded it to the Judge and the DA. As I stood before the Judge there was a change in his demeanor and I knew immediately a miracle was going take place. He opened up by stating that he received the information from your office and was quite impressed with my military records and letters of character. As the result of your description of my true character instead of some thug, the Judge reduced my sentence to a just punishment of five years’ probation.”

Despite the fact that he was not a combat veteran, nor did he suffer from PTSD or other service-related mental health conditions, the VDP’s mitigation helped lead the court to a realization of the true nature of his character and that he had sacrificed years of his life in service to his country. The result was a fairer sentence.
After Surviving Violence in Kuwait & Iraq
Wounded and Homeless Veteran is On the Road to Recovery

**U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Jerry Brown**

Jerry Brown’s story of military service and sacrifice begins under extraordinarily difficult conditions as war erupted in the Middle East just as he graduated from high school and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC). His service in the Corps levied a considerable toll on him. He underwent direct fire from insurgents, and bore the pain of the deaths of his fellow Marines, while serving in Iraq. He has regularly undergone close and frequent association with violence and death. Like many members of our armed services, he returned home physically and mentally wounded. The offenses with which Brown was charged are directly traceable to the events of his service in Kuwait and Iraq in 2003.

This Brooklyn native had been charged in Kings County with misdemeanor assault and menacing charges, and in Nassau County with second degree criminal weapons possession charges that carry mandatory state prison sentences, when the VDP was asked to assist with his cases. In addition to providing mitigation in both cases, the VDP connected him with housing referrals since he, his girlfriend, and their baby were homeless and sleeping outside. The VDP also provided crisis intervention help and referred him to the Brooklyn VA for assistance. The VDP has maintained an ongoing mentoring relationship with Brown to provide him with help and referrals to veteran-based resources.

He was denied entrance into the Nassau County Veterans Treatment Court due to the weapons charge. Fortunately, the courts in both counties were convinced by the VDP’s Mitigation Memorandum to not impose incarceration, and he is now on the road to recovery.
Peer-to-Peer Mentoring’s Wrap Around Support Provides Vital Assistance Veterans Need and Deserve

U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Peter Wolcott*

Peter Wolcott is a Post-9/11 U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) veteran who served our country honorably from 2013 to 2017. His military occupational specialty was in artillery as a cannon crewman. After a year and a half of overseas service during two deployments to the Mediterranean and Southeast Asia, he wanted to go back home to help support his family. His service had taken a toll on his health—after spending 4 years as a cannon crewmember he needed hearing aids at a young age.

Upon receiving his honorable discharge, he obtained a job which required him to travel up and down the east coast. Originally from the south, he was working in New York State when he was arrested and charged with assault. Immediately following his arrest, he contacted the VDP. Any veteran is more comfortable talking to another veteran rather than a civilian, and for veterans from the same branch of the military sometimes even more so. The two VDP Veteran Case Managers, Michael and Richard, are also Marines, and the three of them quickly established a rapport and sought to give Wolcott the help he needed. Immediately after conducting an initial intake, the case managers began working on sending releases to him to obtain military records that are needed to write Mitigation Memorandum. During this time, the VDP regularly received calls from his mother asking for updates, and the case managers would assure her they were doing everything they could for her son.

Unlike the VDP’s regular peer-to-peer assistance, the majority of the mentoring for this client came after sentencing. His sentence was 3 to 3.5 years of imprisonment. Soon after his placement at a correctional facility, the case managers visited to ensure his well-being. Unfortunately, not long after the visit his hearing aids broke. Because he had received the hearing aids at a hospital on a Marine Corps base, the Department of Corrections & Community Supervision (DOCCS) staff could not figure out the part number for replacement. So, Richard called various centers to find out which model was distributed during Wolcott’s time in service. The information was forwarded to the VDP’s contacts within DOCCS to ensure that Wolcott could live as comfortably as possible and receive the care he needed.

“The work done by the VDP carries so much further than the legal aid that our clients receive. Both attorneys and support staff work tirelessly to provide veterans with the help they need, as attested to by many clients’ testimonies. The VDP Case Managers’ peer-to-peer mentoring is the starting point of our veteran clients’ journey in restoration. It is often a stressful and traumatic time, however, our military specialization and background can help ease their nerves early on, so we can properly assist these veterans in getting the assistance they deserve.” Richard Henry, VDP Case Manager, USMC, Batavia, NY.

*Case Study veteran names have been changed for privacy protection. The photographs used in this section are representative of the types of individuals the VDP assists.
Fulfilling the United States Supreme Court Ruling
That Defense Counsel Must Investigate a Veteran Defendant’s
Military Service and Battle-Borne Mental Health Issues

The VDP is helping public defenders fulfill their constitutional obligation to investigate their client’s military service and any related mental health issues that may have contributed to their offense, and to seek mitigation. In Porter v. McCollum, 558 U.S. 30 (2009), the United States Supreme Court ruled per curiam that defense attorneys must adequately investigate their client’s military background to include battle-borne mental health issues, such as PTSD, and reasonably present such evidence in mitigation.

Although the defendant, Porter, was a decorated Korean War veteran, his court-appointed counsel did not present evidence of his military service to the jury, and the Court reasoned this evidence might have swayed the jury. The Court found that his attorney provided ineffective assistance of counsel.

The Supreme Court emphasized:

“Our Nation has a long tradition of according leniency to veterans in recognition of their service, especially for those who fought on the front lines as Porter did. Moreover, the relevance of Porter’s extensive combat experience is not only that he served honorably under extreme hardship and gruesome conditions, but also that the jury might find mitigating the intense stress and mental and emotional toll that combat took on Porter.” (Porter v. McCollum, 558 U.S. 30, 130 S. Ct. 447 [2009]).
VDP Legal Trainings, Educational Presentations & Outreach Benefited 1,800 People

The VDP conducted 27 Continuing Legal Education (CLE) trainings, educational presentations, and outreach at events and online webinars informing hundreds of attorneys representing veteran clients, veterans, and supporters of veterans. It also provided education, resources, helpful publications, and staff contacts to over 1,370 users through its updated website at https://www.nysda.org/page/VDPWelcome

Veteran Appreciation Ceremony, Bay Shore, NY, Outreach, 11/7/2019

Suffolk County Sheriff's Task Force Meeting, Yaphank Correctional Facility, Yaphank, NY, Presentation, 11/8/2019

Veteran Appreciation Ceremony, Touro Law School, Central Islip, NY, Outreach, 11/12/2019

New York State Council of Veterans' Organizations Meeting, Albany, NY, Educational Presentation, 11/13/2019

Joining Forces, University of Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, Outreach, 11/15/2019

Suffolk County Bar Association's Pro Bono Veterans' Clinic, Hauppauge, NY, Outreach, 11/19/2019

Albany County Office of the Public Defender Meeting, Albany, NY, Educational Presentation, 11/21/2019

New York State Division of Veteran Affairs Meeting with Director Jim McDonough, U.S. Army COL (Ret.), Albany, NY, Educational Presentation, 11/21/2019

2nd Annual Veteran Treatment Court Statewide Convening, Albany, NY, Educational Conference, 11/22/2019

Nassau County Stand Down, Freeport, NY, Outreach, 11/26/2019

Westchester Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services and Veterans Treatment Court Event, White Plains, NY, Outreach, 12/5/2019

Military Cultural Competence and Investigation of the Veteran Case, Erie County Bar Association Aid to Indigent Prisoners Society, Buffalo, NY, CLE Training, 12/6/2019

Representing Your Veteran Client, The Legal Aid Society, Queens, NY, CLE Training, 12/11/2019

Monroe County Veterans Treatment Court, Rochester, NY, Outreach, 1/13/2020

Dutchess County Public Defenders’ Open House, Poughkeepsie, NY, Outreach, 1/16/2020

In Honor Of TV Show, Staten Island, NY, Educational Presentation, 2/3/2020

Military Orientation Program on Collateral Consequences, New York, NY, CLE Training, 2/11/2020

Public Interest Government Job Fair, Touro Law School, Central Islip, NY, Outreach, 2/11/2020

NYS Military & Veteran Committee Meeting, Suffolk County, NY, Virtual Outreach, 2/18/2020
Understanding the Veteran Client, Albany County Office of the Public Defender Lunchtime Training, Albany, NY, Educational Presentation, 2/20/2020

Interview of the Veteran: Getting a Complete History, NYSDA Virtual VDP Learning at Lunch Series, CLE Training, 8/19/2020

Collateral Consequences: Military Impacts of Civilian Justice, NYSDA Virtual VDP Learning at Lunch Series, CLE Training, 8/20/2020

PTSD, TBI, and Suicide Within the Veteran Community, NYSDA Virtual VDP Learning at Lunch Series, CLE Training, 8/21/2020

3rd Annual New York State Public Defenders Career Fair, University of Buffalo, Virtual Outreach, 10/30/2020

Is it Right for Your Client, New York State Bar Association, Moderator of Virtual Educational Presentation, 11/13/2020

New York State Bar Association Veteran Committee, Virtual Educational Presentation, 11/13/2020

3rd Annual Veteran Treatment Court Statewide Convening, Virtual Educational Conference, 12/5/2020

“You definitely gave one of the best CLE presentations I have ever seen. Thanks for your help!”
Diana Salierno, The Legal Aid Society, Queens, NY.

“The best CLE I have ever attended, and I have been in private practice for nearly twenty years.”
Evaluation comment from an attorney who attended a VDP New York State Bar Association Training, Albany, NY.
The VDP honored Senator John Brooks, Chair of the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs Committee (center) with a Distinguished Service Award at a reception for the first anniversary of the VDP Long Island office on December 12, 2019. (L-R) VDP Case Manager Juan Sosa, VDP Deputy Director Roy Diehl, Senator Brooks, VDP Long Island Staff Attorney Blair Hill, and VDP Assistant Program Coordinator Barbara Lombardi.

VDP Case Manager Richard Henry, U.S. Marine Corps, and Staff Attorney Sandra Cassidy consult on a veteran’s case in the Batavia office.
Veterans Defense Program Staff

**Gary A. Horton, VDP Director.** Gary directs the VDP, and provides training and legal assistance to justice-involved veterans in Western NY. Previously, he worked in public defense for over 30 years, 20 years of which he was the Chief Public Defender of Genesee County. He is past President of the Genesee Veterans Support Network, and served on NYSDA's Board of Directors. He received the National Legal Aid & Defenders Association Kutak-Dodds Award in 2018; National Alliance for Mental Health-NYS Criminal Justice Award in 2016; NYSDA Wilfred R. O'Connor Award in 2011, NYS Bar Association Criminal Justice Section David S. Michaels Award in 2006 and the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York Special Service Award in 2005. He has a J.D. from Hofstra University School of Law and a B.A. in Political Science from Hobart College.

**Roy M. Diehl, VDP Deputy Director.** Roy provides legal assistance to justice-involved veterans in the Hudson Valley, Bronx, New York, and Staten Island. He enlisted in the Army in 1984, was commissioned in 1998, and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2015. His military career includes service in Germany during the Cold War, at Ground Zero in 2001, Iraq in 2005 with the NY Army National Guard’s 42nd Infantry Division, and four tours of duty at the Pentagon. Awards include the Army Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, and the New York Defense of Liberty Medal with WTC device. Over the course of 26 years in uniform he served as Senior Defense Counsel, International Law Officer, Operational Law Attorney, Russian linguist, and Tank Gunner. Roy is a graduate of Albany Law School and the University of Toledo.

**Blair Hill, VDP Staff Attorney.** Blair provides legal assistance to justice-involved veterans in Long Island, Brooklyn, and Queens. A graduate of Hofstra University School of Law, she graduated summa cum laude from Montclair State University. She focused on Public Interest Law at Hofstra, interning with the VDP and Mercy Haven, and was a member of the Veteran Law Student Association and Veteran Legal Assistance Program. Previously, she worked at Sunrise House Foundation as a recreational therapist for people suffering from substance abuse; Nassau/Suffolk Law Services Veterans Rights Program; and Brooklyn Legal Services Corp., representing low-income tenants.
**Sandra Cassidy, VDP Staff Attorney.** Sandra provides legal assistance to justice-involved veterans in the North Country and Central New York. A graduate of Northern Arizona University and the SUNY University of Buffalo (UB) Law School cum laude, she is admitted to practice in all New York State Courts; the U.S. District Court for the Western District of NY; the U.S. Court of Federal Claims; and the U.S. Supreme Court. She graduated from Gerry Spence’s Trial Lawyers College, and served as an adjunct professor of criminal law. She attended Medical School for Lawyers and obtained a UB School of Management certification in Bioinformatics; and practiced medical malpractice law.

**Deanne Quinn Miller, VDP Program Coordinator.** Dee assists with trainings and expert referrals, provides mentoring, and navigates the VA and Department of Defense systems to obtain military records for veteran cases at the VDP’s Batavia office. She has extensive knowledge of veteran issues and benefits. Previously, she was Executive Director of the Genesee Veterans Support Network. She received the VA of Western New York’s Women Veterans Justice System Award in 2016, and a Women of Distinction Award in 2017 for her work with veterans. She is Director of the Forgotten Victims of Attica. She graduated cum laude from the SUNY University at Buffalo with a B.S. in Consumer & Family Studies.

**Michael White, VDP Case Manager.** Michael mentors veteran clients by providing guidance, support, and expert referrals, as well as support to the VDP staff at the Batavia office. He retired from the Marine Corps as a Staff Sergeant in 2014 with 22 years of military experience, including deployments to Haiti, the Philippines, Korea, and Afghanistan. He has extensive firsthand knowledge of the many issues that veterans face and extensive knowledge of military culture, and VA health and education benefits. He has an Associate’s Degree in Human Services, a B.A. in Health and Human Services Community Mental Health, and is currently enrolled in the Social Work Master’s Program at the University of Buffalo.
Richard Henry, VDP Case Manager. Richard mentors veteran clients by providing guidance, support, and expert referrals, as well as support to the VDP staff at the Batavia office. He served as a corporal (E-4) Motor Transport Operator for four years in the U.S. Marine Corps. During his service, he trained new Marine Corps Lieutenants, along with officers from other nations, in convoy operations during Logistics Officer Course field exercises. He was also attached to a small group in charge of training an advisory team prior to deployment to Iraq. He graduated from SUNY Brockport College with a B.S. in Criminal Justice and Political Science, and is currently enrolled at the Albany Law School pursuing a J.D.

Juan Sosa, VDP Case Manager. Juan mentors veteran clients by providing guidance, support, and expert referrals, as well as support to the VDP staff in the Long Island office. He has a Biology degree from Mercy College. In 1993, he joined the U.S. Army Reserve as a Motor Transport Operator and deployed to Iraq twice, in 2002-03 and 2006-07. He has extensive firsthand knowledge of the many issues that veterans face and extensive knowledge of military culture. He is currently a Sergeant First Class with the 301st Information Operations Battalion, having completed 30 years in the Army Reserve.

Anne Rabe, VDP Organizing Coordinator. Anne conducts fundraising and communication outreach for the VDP. Previously, she was a Senior Legislative Associate for Assemblyman R. Gottfried; Executive Director of NY Environmental Institute; Executive Director of Citizens’ Environmental Coalition; and an organizer for the national Center for Health, Environment & Justice. She has received twelve awards for her work including from the NYS Council of Veterans’ Organizations, NYS Attorney General’s Office, and the NYS Department of Health. She graduated from SUNY Albany with a B.A. in Political Science and Journalism.
“Our statewide veteran council, representing 30 veteran groups, such as the Marines, Disabled American Veterans, VFW and Fleet Reserves Association, strongly support the critically important work of the VDP. A number of our members have been helped by the VDP and their advocacy for mitigation and treatment to heal a veteran’s battle-borne illness. Justice-involved veterans need the VDP. The VDP is truly defending those who defended America.”

Robert Becker, President, NYS Council of Veterans Organizations, Albany, NY.

VDP Case Manager Juan Sosa, then a Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army Reserve, while deployed near Mosul, Iraq
A Special *THANK YOU* to Supporters

The VDP greatly appreciates the New York State Legislature's budget appropriation for the VDP in the FY 2020/2021 State Budget.

Special thanks to NYS Senator John Brooks and NYS Assemblymember Didi Barrett, Chairs of the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs Committee and the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee, and NYS Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and NYS Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie.

Thanks also to the strong support of many other state legislators, especially many members of the NYS Senate and Assembly Veterans Affairs, Codes, Crimes, Finance, Health, Judiciary, and Ways & Means Committees.
For Information and Assistance, Contact the Veterans Defense Program

List of Attorneys and NYS Judicial District (JD) Coverage Areas

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JD 4, 5 & 6 (North Country, Central NY)

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