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**Vietnam Veterans of America  
New York State Council  
Ned. D. Foote, President**

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**New York State Assembly**

**Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**Chair: Didi Barrett**

**Standing Committee on Local Governments**

**Chair: Fred W. Thiele, Jr.**

**Standing Committee on Cities**

**Chair: Edward C. Braunstein**

**Sub-Committee on Women Veterans**

**Chair: Pamela J. Hunter**

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**Thursday, October 17, 2019**



**Vietnam Veterans of America**  
***New York State Council***  
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**“Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.”**

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Committee Chairs Barrett, Thiele, Braunstein, and Hunter, and Committee Members, on behalf of our organization, the Vietnam Veterans of America New York State Council (VVA), thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

As you are aware, there are numerous not-for-profit organizations and governmental agencies across our New York State that provide services in support of our veteran community. These services include, but are not limited to, filing claims for federal benefits / entitlements, housing, social services, mental health services, and medical services.

All federal benefits are initially applied for either by veterans representing themselves before the Department of Veteran Affairs, or by the use of Power of Attorney representatives, who must be accredited by the Department of Veteran Affairs General Counsel to represent veterans.

Representatives of VVA are accredited by the Department of Veteran Affairs to facilitate claims on behalf of all veterans (and their dependents) from all areas of the state, regardless of when or where military service was performed, and our Veteran Service Officers regularly facilitate claims for any and all veterans who need assistance in claims filing.

Records indicate that for the month of March 2019, veterans and dependents represented by VVA Veteran Service Officers received benefits totaling \$5,535.965. This amount does not include the total cost of the medical care provided through the Department of Veteran Affairs, nor does it account for the innumerable dollars generated into the New York State economy by the recipients who live and work here.

Moreover, the Department of Veteran Affairs has recently approved "Blue Water Veterans" and their dependents of the Vietnam War to be entitled to benefits as a result of the exposure to Agent Orange. It is estimated that the number of new and reopened claims as a result of this re-classification will result in excess of 2,500 additional claims to be initiated! These claimants will require our services.

In an effort to maximize the effectiveness of delivering these services, it is our recommendation that those organizations with a proven track record of success within the area of benefits expertise be provided with the grant funds and aid to localities funds. Guidance / recommendation for these awards should be provided by the Director, New York State Division of Veteran Services.

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Vietnam Veterans of America is honored to hold the distinction of being the only Congressionally Chartered organization representing the interests of Vietnam and Vietnam-era veterans. There are approximately 300,000 Vietnam and Vietnam-era veterans in New York State, the largest single block in the state's population of almost one million veterans!

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**“A NOT-FOR-PROFIT VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION”**