



**Kathy Hochul**  
Governor

**Viviana DeCohen**  
Commissioner

April 8, 2024

The Honorable Jessica Scarcella-Spanton  
Chair, Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee  
New York State Senate  
Legislative Office Building, Room 617  
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Senator Scarcella-Spanton and Members of the Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee,

On behalf of Governor Hochul, I write in response to your letter concerning the release of tax checkoff funds to important veterans' programs.

As you know, Governor Hochul is deeply committed to supporting New York's veterans and their family members. During her administration, the Governor has increased minimum state funding for local veterans service agencies by 150 percent, provided millions of dollars in new funding to expand the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer-to-Peer Veterans' Support Program statewide, and increased resources to the Department of Veterans' Services Veterans Benefits Advising Program, including \$1.25 million in appropriations in the 2024-2025 Executive Budget Proposal to help DVS hire more staff and assist more veterans.

Under Governor Hochul, the Department of Veterans' Services has made it a priority to expand the agency's reach and visibility within the community, bringing more veterans and their families into contact with the state and federal benefits they have earned. DVS has improved partnerships helping the agency connect to veterans as they transition from military to civilian life and has built relationships with public and private partners to help connect veterans and military families to essential services. The agency has also established a network of digital kiosks around the state to meet veterans where they are and provide them with important information about their benefits; the success of this initiative has earned recognition from the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.

This administration has also worked diligently to ensure that the tax checkoff funding referenced in your letter can be spent effectively. Your most recent letter, dated March 25, 2024, urges the immediate release of these funds; I write today to remind you that this funding has already begun to flow to important initiatives benefiting veterans and their families.

As was communicated by the Department of Veterans' Services via e-mail on February 23, 2024 in response to questions asked by many of your Members during the agency's budget testimony, the fund to aid veterans facing housing insecurity was operationalized in a pilot program launched by DVS on February 9, 2024. This was announced through an agency press release and shared through a targeted outreach campaign including social media channels, distribution of information at community events and veteran service organizations, and direct communication with veteran support networks and service providers, including county veterans service agencies. DVS has also posted detailed information about the program on the agency's website. Further, appropriation authority has been included in the budget extenders to ensure that there are no interruptions in payments even though the budget has not been fully agreed to.

As also noted in DVS's February 23 e-mail, the agency has begun utilizing the tax checkoff funding for State Veterans Cemetery operations and maintenance. As you know, this funding has historically not been spent because New York State did not have a State Veterans Cemetery until February 2023, when Governor Hochul announced that the State had formally taken ownership of what is now the New York State Veterans Cemetery – Finger Lakes, located in Seneca County. The Department of Veterans' Services subsequently secured nearly \$4 million in federal grant funding to support improvements at the site. Since the State took ownership of the cemetery, more than \$127,000 in tax checkoff funding has been utilized to support cemetery operations and maintenance, and the agency will continue to utilize that funding in a responsible manner to support the State's commitment to providing New York's Veterans with a dignified final resting place.

This administration will continue working hard each and every day to support New York State's veterans and their families, including through the appropriate and effective use of tax checkoff funding donated by generous New Yorkers. We look forward to your continued support and partnership in these efforts.

Sincerely,



Viviana DeCohen  
Commissioner

New York State Department of Veterans' Services



Joel Evans  
Executive Deputy Commissioner

New York State Department of Veterans' Services