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GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

**GOVERNOR CUOMO ANNOUNCES 35TH PROPOSAL OF 2020 STATE OF THE STATE:
ADDRESSING VETERAN AND LAW ENFORCEMENT SUICIDES AND HOMELESSNESS**

Proposal Will Invest \$5 Million to Expand Affordable Housing and Wraparound Services to Address Veteran Homelessness

Will Invest \$1 Million to Help Veterans, Law Enforcement and First Responders with Suicide Prevention Efforts

New Partnership with Nonprofit 'Modern States' Further Extends 'Freshman Year for Free Program' to Veterans and Active Duty Military Families

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the 35th proposal of his 2020 State of the State Agenda - addressing veteran and law enforcement suicides and homelessness. Under the proposal, the Governor will direct funding within the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program to be used to close the gap in veterans housing across the state. The Governor will also direct the State Office of Mental Health to partner with veterans and law enforcement organizations to coordinate on suicide prevention initiatives including new efforts to reduce the stigma of mental illness. Additionally, the Governor is announcing a new partnership between SUNY and the nonprofit Modern States to further extend the Freshman Year for Free program to veterans and active duty military families.

"America's veterans risk their lives to defend our freedom, and in this state we honor them by expanding the resources and opportunities they need to lead a healthy, dignified life," **Governor Cuomo said.** "This year we are going to work to expand affordable housing investments, mental health services and college education opportunities to ensure we have the backs of our veterans just as they had ours."

Expanding Affordable Housing and Wrap-Around Support Services to Address Veteran Homelessness

Veterans are more likely to experience homelessness than nonveterans, and many veterans at-risk for homelessness are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder or substance use disorder, complicating efforts to get them into stable housing. While significant progress has been made to house veterans over the past decade, more needs to be done so that we can honor and support those who have put their lives on the line to defend our nation.

To address veterans' homelessness, the Governor will invest \$5 million to expand permanent supportive housing with wrap-around support services for homeless veterans through the

state's Homeless Housing and Assistance Program. Additionally, New York State Homes and Community Renewal will designate housing opportunities within their affordable housing developments so that homeless veterans in receipt of rental subsidies and federal vouchers can more readily access affordable housing.

The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance will work with localities and the Department of Veterans' Services to help provide permanent housing to veterans within 90 days of their becoming homeless and will help ensure temporary housing and services are provided in the interim. OTDA will do this by adding a Veteran Homelessness section to the already required Homeless Services Plans submitted by localities every two years. These questions will help OTDA to understand the nature of veteran homelessness in each locality and will enable OTDA to assist the locality to develop a specific plan to end it. These plans will include access to the resources being made available by the Governor.

New Mental Health Support, Suicide Prevention and Anti-Stigma Efforts

While suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, risks are much greater amongst veterans, law enforcement, correction officers, and first responders. Veteran suicide rates, both nationally and in New York, are higher than the general population: in New York, the veteran suicide rate is 17.5 per 100,000 people compared with a rate of 10.5 per 100,000 people for the general population. Additionally, more law enforcement officers die from suicide than in the line of duty. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that veterans, law enforcement, correction officers and first responders often fail to seek help in times of distress because of the stigma and detriments of seeking mental health assistance in their respective professions.

To address these problems, the Governor will invest \$1 million to partner with organizations to help veterans, law enforcement, correction officers and first responders with suicide prevention efforts. The Governor will direct state agencies to expand suicide prevention strategies for veterans, law enforcement, correction officers and first responders, including efforts by the Office of Mental Health to reduce the stigma of mental illness and to help ensure that they are not afraid to come forward when they need to seek help. This will include public awareness messaging on social media and other outreach to service providers and veterans.

The State will convene a panel of stakeholders and experts at its annual Suicide Prevention Conference to develop and implement strategies for preventing suicide among these special populations.

Further Extending Freshman Year for Free Program

At no cost to New York State or students, Governor Cuomo is announcing a new partnership between SUNY and ModernStates.org, a philanthropy that will offer a full library of free online college courses and textbooks for all New Yorkers and will pay the costs for up to 1,000 credit bearing exams for New York veterans and active duty military families who complete Modern States' courses for use at SUNY Empire State College. The credits will be transferable to other SUNY schools.

Modern States offers state-of-the-art courses taught by college professors in all 33 subjects for which there is a credit-bearing CLEP - or College Level Examination Program -- exam from the

College Board. The Modern States program has 180,000 registered users to date and has paid for approximately 30,000 exams for New Yorkers and for students around the world. The Governor's initiative will help further extend the Freshman Year for Free opportunity to New York's military veterans, active duty military families, and all other students and lifelong learners, allowing them to earn up to one full year of college credit tuition free.

Governor Cuomo has made a strong commitment to the nearly 750,000 veterans living in New York State, enacting the nation's largest fund for service-disabled veteran-owned businesses; convening the State's first-ever Summit on Veterans and Military Families; launching the Justice for Heroes Initiative to fund legal clinics at law schools that provide assistance to veterans; providing funding for nonprofits that offer peer-to-peer support for veterans and their families; waiving the application fee for veterans taking Civil Service exams; and directing the Suicide Prevention Task Force to focus on veterans as a priority population in the development of recommendations to specifically address the mental health challenges faced by veterans. More recently, the Governor signed a package of bills to enhance support and bolster protections for New Yorkers who serve or have served in the armed forces, including a mandated report by state agencies to determine the number of homeless persons in New York State who are veterans. But more needs to be done to help veterans and law enforcement.

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