

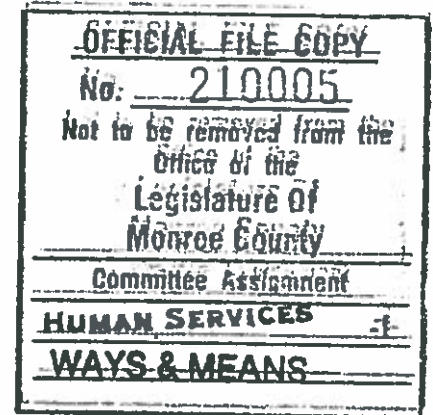


# *Monroe County Legislature*

**GEORGE J. HEBERT**  
LEGISLATOR – DISTRICT 15

January 11, 2021

To the Honorable  
Monroe County Legislature  
407 County Office Building  
Rochester, New York 14614



**Subject: Amending the 2021 Monroe County Budget to Authorize an Increase to the Veterans Service Agency Budget to Add an Additional County Service Worker Position and Implement a Pilot Ecotherapy Program for Veterans**

Honorable Legislators:

Our community owes a debt of gratitude to the men and women who served in our armed forces. The freedoms and liberties we enjoy are due to the bravery of our service men and women, in particular, our combat veterans. Sadly, many veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress or other trauma related conditions. This can affect a person's ability to maintain employment, personal relationships, and unfortunately can lead to dire situations like homelessness and suicide.

According to a 2017 report from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, an average of 17.5 of every 100,000 veterans in New York State commits suicide. Tragically, this number increases to 20.5 of every 100,000 when looking at data within Monroe County. According to the New York State Division of Veterans Services, in 2019 an estimated 1,270 veterans across the state are homeless on any given night. While there is no one-size-fits-all reason, many veterans either have trouble attaining, or have difficulty accepting assistance from healthcare professionals or veteran service organizations.

This legislation will facilitate the accomplishment of two objectives. The first, ensuring a full time Monroe County Veterans Service Agency employee be staffed with the Veterans Outreach Center. The second, to provide funding for the Monroe County Veterans Service Agency to launch a pilot program for ecotherapy, a cutting edge outdoor based counseling program that has shown outstanding success in helping those in the veteran community in need of counseling services.

The Monroe County Veterans Service Agency and the Veterans Outreach Center are both critical veteran resources in our region. However, each organization provides unique services. By having a Monroe County Veteran Service Agency staff member, specifically a Veterans Services Officer, assigned to the Veterans Outreach Center, there will be a trained liaison at the ready to offer help and direction to veterans. This will be most helpful for veterans who visit the Veterans Outreach Center looking for services from the Monroe County Veterans Service Agency, as being told help is at a different office is often a barrier to seeking assistance. Having a Veterans Service Agency representative on site at the Veterans Outreach Center will reduce the number of individuals failing to connect with the Veterans Service Agency in order to acquire the services they were originally seeking.

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A leading resource for veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress or simply re-integrating with society either in the workplace or socially is counseling. While traditional therapy programs are often helpful, sometimes they are unsuccessful. Ecotherapy is a form of counseling that incorporates nature into its counseling methods, offering a new option that integrates counseling services with a team-based outdoor setting that many veterans are accustomed to from their military service. Monroe County is home to Trybe Ecotherapy, which offers this innovative approach to supporting veterans in our community. Outdoor therapy programs similar to Trybe Ecotherapy have been implemented in several west coast states with success and has garnered federal government support through the “Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act” signed into law in December 2020. Bringing this cutting-edge therapy program to our veterans will ensure that those who sacrificed so much for us, and may be suffering with lingering trauma, can receive the help they deserve to continue to contribute to and reintegrate with society at home.

Veterans have long been a source of security and support within our community and throughout our entire country. It is critical that these courageous individuals receive the programs, services and safeguards to protect their well-being beyond their time of service. In order to make meaningful and effective steps towards ensuring veterans have access to crucial resources, we propose that this Honorable Body allocate additional funding for the Veterans Service Agency to provide for the addition of staff and an ecotherapy pilot program. It should be noted, a successful pilot ecotherapy program can be applied in the future to any resident with PTSD symptoms such as battered women and abused children.

**The specific legislative actions required are:**

1. Authorize the transfer of \$172,446 from general fund 9001, fund center 1001020000, Community Contingency Fund, to make available sufficient appropriations for the addition of one (1) full-time County Service Worker and launch an ecotherapy pilot program.
2. Authorize the creation of one (1) additional full-time County Service Worker, Group 12, in the Veterans Service Agency.
3. Amend the 2021 operating budget of the Veterans Service Agency by appropriating the sum of \$47,446 within general fund 9001 from fund center 1001020000, Community Contingency Fund to funds center 7401010000, Veterans Service Agency for the express purpose of funding one (1) newly created County Service Worker position to work in collaboration with the Veterans Outreach Center.
4. Amend the 2021 operating budget of the Veterans Service Agency by appropriating the sum of \$125,000 within general fund 9001 from fund center 1001020000, Community Contingency Fund into funds center 7401010000, Veterans Service Agency, Professional Services for the express purpose of implementing a pilot ecotherapy program.

Monroe County shall comply with all applicable provisions of the Monroe County Procurement Policy prior to awarding any contracts authorized in this referral.

The newly created position of County Service Worker shall be subject to classification by the Civil Service Commission. Funding appropriated for this position is contemplated on a tentative March 1, 2021 hire date and includes funding for salary, retirement, social security contribution, medical insurance, and dental insurance. Full-year funding for this position is estimated to be \$56,535, not accounting for any contractual pay increases or cost of living adjustments.

The provisions of the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act shall be complied with prior to the undertaking, funding, or approving the action in this referral.

Respectfully Submitted,



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George Hebert  
Monroe County Legislator  
District 15