

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATOR KARA HAHN



FIFTH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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From Fee to Free for Suffolk County's Disabled Veterans

Legislature passes Hahn's "Suffolk County Thanks Our Disabled Veterans Act" that will repeal new parks amenity fees for disabled county veterans.

RIVERHEAD, NY – Suffolk Legislators have voted to repeal a number of fee increases that would have hit disabled veterans visiting County parks this summer. The repeals, sponsored by Majority Leader and Parks Committee Chairwoman Kara Hahn, were part of her "Suffolk County Thanks Our Disabled Veterans Act" which lawmakers unanimously approved today. Under the Act, per night amenity fees for camping in Suffolk County Parks will be waived for residents with service-related disabilities. Currently, Suffolk's disabled veterans are not charged for using County parks, however, a recently adopted change to the Parks Department fee structure added electric, hookup, and premiere site charges for camping, and initially didn't include an exemption for disabled veterans. This bill corrects that omission and reaffirms Suffolk County's gratitude for the sacrifices of the men and women of our nation's armed forces.

"With Memorial Day on the horizon, it seems most fitting to rectify the original fee structure's error during this time when we pause to reflect on the selflessness of those who have sacrificed life and limb for liberty," said Legislator Hahn. "We as a county

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say thank you to the ordinary men and women whose extraordinary actions helped to define our nation's past and shapes its present."

According to Bill Wolf, Sr., a Vice Commander with Disabled American Veterans, "As an Officer of the Disabled American Veterans, The American Legion and the AMVETS and 100% Disabled Veteran who represents Veterans of all ages and eras including the Draft period, I am hopeful that the current Legislative body will see fit to reinstate the camping privileges fought for by the Disabled Veteran and Bob Gaffney. This is a benefit that we earned defending this country at the sacrifice of our health and our lives. It is costing us a lot; it's costing you very little."

For 2017, Suffolk County adopted a parks department fee schedule that was intended to more accurately reflect actual costs incurred by the department for providing certain amenities. On average, fee increases were limited to 10% under the plan. Budget analysts expect this fee reduction will cost the County approximately \$31,000 in 2017; however, that shortfall will be made up by cuts to consultant services for the County Executive's office.

"Suffolk County's disabled veterans served our Country honorably, and they now live on fixed incomes due to their service related injuries," stated Legislator Kate Browning, a co-sponsor of the repeal. "We have always been proud of the reasonable discounts we provide to our disabled veterans so that they can afford to enjoy our beautiful parks, and this will ensure that commitment continues."

Legislator Steve Stern added, "As Chairman of the Veterans Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature, I am proud to sponsor the "Suffolk County Thanks Our Disabled Veterans Act," which eliminates amenities fees for camping in Suffolk County Parks for disabled veterans. I have had the honor and privilege of working with and for the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much to protect our great nation, especially those who have sustained service connected disabilities. We owe them more

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than our thanks. We owe them meaningful action and this legislation is an important way to demonstrate our commitment to our veterans and their families.”

The bill now goes to County Executive Steve Bellone for his expected signature.

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