

BY: M. of A. Jean-Pierre

COMMEMORATING the 10th Anniversary of the New York State Defenders Association's Veterans Defense Program

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and commend illustrious organizations of the State of New York that have made a substantial impact on the lives of veterans and their families; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commend the Veterans Defense Program (VDP) of the New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA) upon the occasion of its 10th Anniversary; and

WHEREAS, NYSDA's Executive Director Jonathan E. Gradess and Board Member Gary A. Horton identified the failure of our justice system to recognize veterans' service-related trauma and mental health conditions and the need for treatment rather than incarceration; and

WHEREAS, NYSDA founded the VDP in 2014, the first program of its kind in the nation that has the goal of ensuring each veteran has an effective advocate in New York's criminal and family courts; and

WHEREAS, The VDP started with three employees and has grown to a staff of four expert attorneys, three veteran case managers, and an experienced veteran program coordinator; and

WHEREAS, The VDP promotes trauma-informed representation of veterans and service members by providing substantial legal assistance, mitigation, and training to public defense attorneys representing veterans involved in the criminal and family court systems and offering treatment referrals and peer-to-peer mentoring to justice-involved veterans; and

WHEREAS, The VDP has helped many justice-involved veterans to be diverted into treatment while sparing veterans from incarceration and connecting them to treatment, leading to family restoration and meaningful re-integration into their communities; and

WHEREAS, The VDP has trained hundreds of defense attorneys, judges, prosecutors, and other members of New York's criminal and family courts about military culture and cultural competency, trauma-informed representation, and the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Military Sexual Trauma, and other conditions; and

WHEREAS, The VDP staff have dedicated themselves to providing services to improve the lives of justice-involved veterans; and

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Veterans Defense Program, recognizing its crucial role in improving and strengthening the lives of justice-involved veterans and their families; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the New York State Defenders Association's Veterans Defense Program.