

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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PRESS RELEASE

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‘ZOMBIE HOMES’ TO BE RENOVATED FOR HOMELESS VETERANS
Legislator Steve Stern joins Congressman Steve Israel to announce federal legislation to renovate blighted properties for struggling servicemembers



Suffolk County Legislator Steve Stern joins Congressman Steve Israel at the site of a “zombie home” in Dix Hills.

HUNTINGTON, NY – Suffolk County Legislator Steve Stern (D-Huntington, 16th L.D.), Chairman of the Veterans and Seniors Committee, joined Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington, NY-3), local residents and veterans’ advocates on Tuesday, November 9, 2015, to announce federal legislation to turn “zombie homes” into suitable housing for homeless veterans.

Legislator Stern authored the “*Housing Our Homeless Heroes Act*” last year, which made it possible for tax-defaulted properties in Suffolk County to be distributed to veterans’ organizations for renovation and utilized to house homeless veterans and their families. Congressman Israel’s legislation, named the “*Housing Our Heroes Act*,” expands upon this aggressive effort by creating a federal three-year pilot program which provides grants

to Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to purchase and renovate zombie homes to provide a pathway to homeownership for homeless veterans and eliminate blight from our neighborhoods.

“No soldier who has ever worn the uniform of our great nation and gone off to protect the ground we stand on should ever have to come home to sleep on it,” Legislator Stern said. “This legislation will help ensure that our military heroes have a place to call home while turning blighted properties into houses fit for heroes. Thank you to Congressman Steve Israel for introducing this important initiative to not only assist our veterans, but also to improve the quality of life for all of our neighbors.”

“It is simply unacceptable that our veterans, who have sacrificed so much to defend our country, should ever be forced to sleep on the streets at night,” said Rep. Steve Israel. “My legislation will not only put a roof over our heroes’ heads, it will also transform unsightly zombie homes into renovated properties that will revitalize housing markets in many of our Long Island communities. Whenever we get the opportunity to eliminate two problems with one sustainable solution, we should act on it.”

According to a 2014 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) [report](#), national veteran homelessness has declined by 33 percent since 2010. However, there are still an estimated 49,933 homeless veterans on the street on any given night in the United States, including more than 2,500 veterans in New York State.

A 2014 *Newsday* study found that Suffolk County had 2,084 zombie homes and Nassau had 1,960. The same report found that zombie houses have cost Long Island at least \$295 million in depreciated home values, while Long Island municipalities spent at least \$3.2 million to clean, maintain and board up these zombie properties in 2013. A zombie home is commonly referred to a home that is in the foreclosure process that is maintained by neither the lender nor the homeowner. In New York the foreclosure process averages 934 days which can leave some homes vacant and decaying for years.

“Huntington residents have been dealing with the zombie home epidemic in our neighborhoods for far too long,” said Huntington Town Councilwoman Tracey Edwards. “Congressman Israel’s legislation will help improve the quality of life for our veterans and Huntington residents whose home values have been negatively impacted by these eyesores. I look forward to working with him to ensure our residents are taken care of.”

“On Veteran's Day, as our nation reflects on the sacrifices that military service men and women have made, and continue to make each day, in service to our country United Way of Long Island is pleased to be part of a neighborhood stabilization initiative that will find innovative ways to provide affordable and energy efficient housing for veterans through the federal Housing our Heroes Act,” said Teresa Regnante, President and CEO of United Way Long Island. “We applaud Congressman Israel for his work on behalf of veterans.”

“At the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless, our main goal is to end homelessness and help improve the lives of Long Islanders who may become homeless,” said Greta Guarton, Executive Director at Long Island Coalition for the Homeless. “I applaud Congressman Israel for introducing this legislation to help strengthen our mission and improve the lives of not only our veterans, but our entire Long Island community.”

“Passing the *Housing Our Heroes Act* would be a win-win for Long Island veterans and residents,” said Frank Amalfitano, Director of United Veterans Beacon House. “Placing homeless veterans in these homes will give them the opportunity and foundation they need to become independent successful members of our community. I applaud Congressman Israel for fighting to improve the lives of our veterans.”

“After fighting for our country, veterans deserve every opportunity possible to help get back on their feet and on track,” said Beth Gabellini, Regional Director of Long Island Supportive Services for Veteran Families.

“Congressman Israel’s bill will help us expedite the process of getting veterans and their families off the streets and into homes which provide a stable base for their continued recovery.”

“Zombie homes aren’t only eyesores in our neighborhood, they are actively reducing the value of our homes that we have worked so hard to maintain,” said Gina Raio Bitsimis, Dix Hills homeowner and zombie home neighbor. “I thank Congressman Israel for working to transform these costly eyesores into beautiful homes for our country’s veterans. My family and I will welcome these brave men and women into our neighborhood with open arms and look forward to the increase of both our quality of life and the value of our property.”