

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

Jointly with

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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November 10, 2014
Start: 1:00 p.m.
Recess: 4:30 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Eric A. Ulrich
Chairperson

Stephen T. Levin
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Annabel Palma
Fernando Cabrera
Ruben Wills
Donovan J. Richards
Vanessa L. Gibson
Corey D. Johnson
Carlos Menchaca
Ritchie J. Torres

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Congressman Charles Rangel

Loree Sutton
Commissioner of Mayor's Office of Veteran
Affairs

Iris Rodriguez
Assistant Commissioner for Adult Families and
Veterans at DHS

Camille Rivera
Department of Homeless Services Deputy
Commissioner

Triada Stampas
Food Bank of NYC

John Rowan
Vietnam Veterans of America

Kevin Kenneally
New York Legal Assistance Group

Kamilla Sjödin
New York Legal Assistance Group

Sharon Sweeting-Lindsey
Vets Incorporated

Matthew Silverstein
America Works NYC

Craig Caruana
America Works NYC

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Carla Giglio
America Works NYC

Coco Culhane
Veteran Advocacy Project of Urban Justice Center

John Medina
Community Voices Heard

Erin Burns-Maine
CSH

Peter Kempner
Legal Services NYC

Linda Crowley
Military Families Speak Out

Bill Busk
Concerned citizen

2 UNIDENTIFIED: Alright, ladies and
3 gentleman, just get ready. We are about to start.
4 Make sure all the sound--cell phones are all put on
5 vibration. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon. I
7 am Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the Council
8 Veterans Committee. We are pleased to be joined
9 today by my friend and colleague, Council Member
10 Steve Levin of Brooklyn, Chairman of the General
11 Welfare Committee and members of that committee as
12 well. I thank Chair Levin and the General Welfare
13 Committee for jointly holding this important
14 oversight hearing. Today, we are here to examine two
15 of the most critical issues facing our nation's
16 veterans, lack of access to food and shelter. The
17 Food Bank of New York estimates that more than 70,000
18 veterans, 30 percent of New York City's total veteran
19 population lacks food security and relies on food
20 pantries and soup kitchens to feed themselves and
21 their families. Veterans report skipping meals,
22 purchasing less food, cutting back on the purchase of
23 nutritious food such as fruits and vegetables and
24 serving fewer family members to save money. They are
25 increasingly forced to choose between paying rent

2 and/or utilities and paying for food for themselves
3 and their families. These are real choices that no
4 New Yorker, particularly those who have given back so
5 much to our city and country through their service
6 should ever have to make. Veterans confront unique
7 challenges which contribute to hunger and food
8 insecurity. Younger veterans, particularly female
9 veterans experience higher rates of unemployment than
10 the general population. Many veterans work in low-
11 paying jobs, which do not provide enough money to
12 support a family, especially in the city with a high
13 cost of living as New York. Veterans who have
14 suffered service-connected disabilities,
15 approximately 15 percent of the veteran's population,
16 often face limitations in workforce participation and
17 high medical expenses, which limit food funds and the
18 ability to purchase and provide for themselves.

19 United States Department of Agriculture has found a
20 substantial overlap between disability and food
21 insecurity. Veterans of all services areas,
22 especially combat veterans have experienced
23 psychological trauma such as post-traumatic stress
24 disorder, which makes it more difficult for them to
25 adjust back to civilian life. We should never forget

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2 the impact that service often has on the children of
3 these veterans as well, of which there are
4 approximately more than 443,000 currently of school-
5 age. While both the federal government and the State
6 of New York offer a number of nutrition assistance
7 programs, it is clear from the Food Bank statistic I
8 mentioned previously and from what we hear from
9 veterans, veteran's service organizations and their
10 families that more can and must be done. Today, the
11 Committees on Veterans and General Welfare expect to
12 hear about the city's current efforts to address
13 hunger and food insecurity among veterans and discuss
14 ways in which the city can continue to address this
15 important issue. Today, we will also hear proposed
16 Intro 204A, a resolution calling upon the State
17 Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign,
18 legislation which would require the New York State
19 Division of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study
20 regarding homeless female veterans in New York,
21 sponsored by my Veterans Committee colleagues Council
22 Member Vallone along with Council Members Chin,
23 Dickens, Gibson, Koo, Levin, Rosenthal, Cohen and
24 myself. The resolution acknowledges the unique
25 challenges that female veterans face, including

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2 raising children, providing for their families, and
3 the psychological effects of military sexual trauma
4 and how often that effects them. We're calling on
5 the state to enact legislation that would study this
6 issue to provide us with more information about New
7 York's homeless female veterans and to provide
8 recommendations to address this growing problem.

9 Before I introduce my co-chair for today's hearing, I
10 would like to acknowledge the members of the Veterans
11 Committee who have joined us. We've been joined by
12 Council Member Andrew Cohen of the Bronx. We've been
13 joined by Council Member Vallone, the prime sponsor
14 of the Resolution we are considering, and that is for
15 the time being. I'll now turn the mic over to
16 Council Member Levin, who is the Chair of the General
17 Welfare Committee.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
19 Chair Ulrich. Good afternoon everybody. I am
20 Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the City
21 Council's Committee on General Welfare. I wanted to
22 thank Council Member Ulrich, Chair of the Veterans
23 Committee for holding this joint hearing with me and
24 for everyone who has come today to testify. As
25 Council Member Ulrich as mentioned, in light of

2 Veterans Day tomorrow, we are here today to discuss
3 how we as a city can bring an end to hunger and
4 homelessness among veterans in New York City. As we
5 are all aware, New York City is experiencing record
6 levels of homelessness. There are now well over
7 57,600 individuals sleeping in shelter each night and
8 an estimated 3,300 individuals sleeping on the
9 streets and in the subways here in our city every
10 night. Despite these drastic increases, according to
11 the US Department of Housing and Urban Development,
12 New York City has seen a 54 percent decline in
13 veteran homelessness over the course of just a single
14 year, this past year from 2013 to 2014, from over
15 3,500 individuals in 2013 to just over 1,600
16 individuals in 2014. We commend the Administration
17 for this achievement. It is significant that at
18 least for this particular population it has been able
19 to successfully move people out of the shelters and
20 off the street and into permanent housing. In
21 addition to the general issues that cause
22 homelessness, including the shortage of affordable
23 housing and income, many veterans are living with the
24 effects of PTSD and substance abuse, and it is
25 critical that these individuals are moved into

2 permanent housing with ongoing support services.

3 Today, we are interested in learning what steps the

4 City of New York took to achieve this drastic

5 reduction. In particular, the committee is

6 interested to know where those veterans are now

7 living and what type of assistances helped get them

8 into permanent housing. In light of Mayor de

9 Blasio's participation in the Federal Mayor's

10 Challenge to End Veterans Homelessness, I also expect

11 to find out today from both the Department of

12 Homeless Services and the Mayor's Office of Veterans

13 Affairs what steps are being taken to continue the

14 trend and end homelessness for every single veteran

15 in New York City. We are--I want to thank my counsel

16 to the General Welfare Committee, Andrea Vasquez,

17 Policy Analyst Tonya Cyrus [sp?], and Finance Analyst

18 Dohemi Sempora [sp?] for preparing for today's

19 hearing, and I am pleased and honored to have a

20 distinguished member of Congress to testify before us

21 first. And Congressman Rangel, if you'll allow me to

22 detail your record of service. Congressman Charles

23 Rangel served in the US Army in 1948 into 1952 in the

24 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, Second Infantry

25 Division of the US Army. He was awarded a Purple

2 Heart, a Bronze Star with Valor and three Battle
3 Stars for his valor and heroism in the Battle of Kunu
4 Ri in Korea. His unit was awarded the Presidential
5 Unit Citation and the Republic of Korea Presidential
6 Unit Citation, and Congressman Rangel was just re-
7 elected to his 23rd term in Congress. And
8 Congressman, if there are any corrections for the
9 record, feel free to make them, and thank you very
10 much for your service and thank you very much for
11 your testimony today.

12 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Chairman Levin and
13 Chairman Ulrich and City Councilmen for coming down
14 and allowing me this great privilege to be able to
15 testify on this very sensitive important subject and
16 also my own City Councilman that does so much for our
17 constituents and we're privileged to serve. I want
18 to thank this committee for with all of the problems
19 that we have for pointing out a great oversight. We
20 have a humane oversight and certainly one that
21 effects our national security since we are so
22 dependent on people volunteer to put themselves
23 [sic] in harm in order to protect the very things
24 that we are so proud of, especially in our city. So,
25 when critics say this is not a City Council, a state

2 problem, it's a federal problem, it's all about
3 problems, whether in public service or like the good
4 reverend, brother [sic] in spiritual services,
5 because the things we're talking about today defies
6 having a party label, it's what Jesus said. He's
7 hungry, he's thirsty, he is naked, and so we all have
8 an obligation, but we also have a special obligation
9 to those warriors who protect the very religions and
10 democracy that allows us to appreciate just how
11 blessed we are as a people and as a nation. So, I
12 would ask the unanimous consent of this august panel
13 to allow me to put my prepared statement into the
14 record and briefly state how important I think this
15 hearing is. And if there's--if there's no objection,
16 I would like to say that for a combat veteran, the
17 road between the celebration we're going to have
18 tomorrow on Veterans Day with the parades and the
19 fanfares and the accolades, it's going to be a very
20 difficult road to travel when we reach the point of
21 Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is when we give thanks
22 for all that has been given to us, and the veterans
23 are those Americans who've prepared to say that even
24 though we pick a special day to do it, this is what
25 America's all about. And how do we get from these

2 same people being heroes one day, and a few days
3 being forgotten, and in deed, me having to join in
4 this morning with members and Chairman in asking for
5 food for these heroes who fought to protect the day
6 that we give homage to how much food we have? The
7 Army does a lot of things beside protect our national
8 security. Since World War II, it allowed bums like
9 me to volunteer, brining nothing to the service
10 except lack of opportunity, and through training they
11 have been able to instill in me and millions of
12 others a sense of worthiness, self-esteem, the
13 ability to perform, and then also the opportunity to
14 say, "And this is my flag and my country, and we are
15 prepared not to let anyone damage that." But when
16 you have served your time, with all this training
17 that you received in how you destroy an enemy, that
18 five minutes is given to how you should be retrained
19 to society in order to be just as productive in
20 building life rather than taking it away. And, with
21 all the medals I have, I might add I didn't get the
22 good conduct medal, but that's an oversight, but it
23 was based on ability to kill. There were no medals
24 when I was discharged as to what did I learn to build
25 a better country. And there's no question in my mind

2 that the same government that's able to determine
3 where Charlie Rangel should be trained to do
4 something productive for the military could find out
5 how all of these people could be trained to do
6 something productive for our country, because we know
7 that the problem isn't a military person having food
8 and a place to live. The question is, why is it that
9 they don't have it, and the reason is clear. People
10 have all types of physical examinations as to what
11 criteria you have to be in order to get into the
12 military. They don't have any as to how you were
13 conditioned mentally when you're being discharged.
14 And it goes unchallenged, but the mental conditions
15 that most of men and women have, we don't have the
16 ability to treat them for reasons that are
17 unacceptable because we could do it. The second
18 thing is that when you have that job, one of the
19 things that the Army has given to us is self-esteem.
20 Some might say that we politicians have more than we
21 need to negotiate, but without it, without it,
22 without it, when the military tells you that you are
23 a warrior, and each one of us proudly talk about our
24 serial number and our outfit and second infantry and
25 second to none, how do you convert that to someone

2 who says, "I have no place to live, no job, and I
3 need some food." And so what we have to do is to
4 treat the people that we're praising on Tuesday as we
5 would treat our kids, our brothers, or our dad in
6 saying we trained them to help us. Can you not help
7 them when they receive that discharge paper so that
8 they don't have to on a Thanksgiving day that comes
9 right after Veterans Day see all of the pictures, all
10 of the television, all of the people that are over
11 eating, and they're standing at a pantry or a shelter
12 as being the less of among us, and the greatest
13 country in the world, the strongest economic country
14 in the world are not eradicating the image and the
15 truth of the matter the way we treat these people.

16 And Reverend Cabrera, let me say something special
17 about the clergy, I was an altar boy. I didn't
18 understand most of the mysteries of my religion. All
19 I knew is that on November 30th, 1950 when I was shot
20 and thought I was dying, I knew how to pray in Latin,
21 in English in the tones and tears, but it may not be
22 difficult to understand that I--God is never come in
23 to have a conversation with me, but some of you
24 people have been called, and have a special unique
25 relationship with a superior being. Please knock on

2 that door and ask them to come down and have these
3 voices to be heard, because I'm not talking about
4 veterans, Democrats or Republicans, I'm talking about
5 something I remembered and it's in the Torah and
6 Quran, and it's something like God was saying I was
7 hungry, thirsty, homeless in jail and sick. None of
8 those issues were involved in the political campaign
9 in this last election, not one of them. If we can
10 only get the spiritual leaders to get involved in
11 what we are wrestling with in the City Council, the
12 state and the Congress and just say, "While you're
13 fighting, don't forget the lesser among us." In
14 hearings like this and our reason for being is well
15 served, and I just cannot--the last thing in the
16 world I thought on the eve of Veterans Day that I'd
17 be in the City Hall testifying for food for veterans,
18 but thank you so much for giving me the opportunity
19 to speak not just for me, but for the veterans that
20 you see that were there this morning, that are here,
21 and especially those veterans who unfortunately are
22 not even aware of the depth of the problems that they
23 were discharged with. So thank you for this. If you
24 have questions, I will exempt to answer them, but
25 it's been a great privilege for me. I don't get an

2 opportunity very often to come down here to
3 participate in what you do and do so well.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you,
5 Congressman, for your very powerful testimony. I can
6 assure you that the formal testimony that you
7 prepared for the committee will be entered into the
8 record, and just for the record, I was an altar boy
9 too. So, we have something in common. I want to
10 recognize two of the members of my committee and then
11 call on the Chair of the General Welfare Committee to
12 recognize and acknowledge the members of his
13 committee who would like to say a few words. We've
14 also been joined by Council Members Alan Maisel of
15 Brooklyn and Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx, and I
16 will let Steve recognize the members of the General
17 Welfare Committee.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'd like to recognize
19 Council Members Carlos Menchaca of Brooklyn, Ritchie
20 Torres of the Bronx, Ruben Wills of Queens. Did we
21 get everybody? Andy Cohen for the Bronx. Thank you
22 all for being here, and if you have questions or
23 comments for Congress member Rangel, Council Member
24 Cabrera?

2 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Congressman, I want
3 to thank you for your service to this great nation of
4 ours. As you know, I am a great admirer of your
5 service. My grandfather fought in World War II. My
6 great uncle fought in World War I, and my father was
7 in the military, and I salute you today. Thank you.
8 You could be literally anywhere else in the United
9 States, but you have chosen to be here with us to
10 syncope [sic] this important issue of homelessness
11 and really food, the most basic necessities to the
12 people that we call our heroes. I had just a couple
13 of quick questions, and I'll be as parsimonious as
14 possible here. You know, we often look to the federal
15 government when it comes to our veterans, but what
16 can you tell the city, the Council Members, the
17 Administration, what would you suggest that we could
18 do better? What would you see would be our role in
19 helping in this particular issue that we're going to
20 be addressing today? And if you would like to talk
21 about any best practices that we could do in that
22 part that I think you hit it right on the nose, the
23 whole issue of transitioning, transitioning back into
24 society, because that's where we need to close if I
25 could call it the back door, where we're losing our

2 men where they're not getting their jobs, they're not
3 getting the training. And if you have any best
4 practices that you could suggest, any suggestions? I
5 know you've come here with a vast wealth of knowledge
6 of experience, and a veteran yourself be more than
7 willing to, all of us here, to hear what you--

8 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: [interposing] All
9 of you have been blessed in having the opportunity to
10 influence a vast number of people that most Americans
11 will be born and died and never will have the
12 opportunity to share their views with other people,
13 and people like you also have congregations that they
14 can talk with. The tragedy about what is happening
15 to the poor in this country and now the middle class
16 is that they don't have that voice. So, what we have
17 to do is be that voice. You don't know how many times
18 I've been cursed out by a homeless veteran in the
19 gutter, and telling you it made me mind my business,
20 and I would not. And so, there has to be something
21 that we feel that we have to do, because the votes
22 are not there. The people that need the help are not
23 the people that we depend on to get elected, and we
24 have to use our influence and pray that we can be
25 fortunate enough to enjoy the satisfaction I get when

2 you're able to help somebody and enjoy it and get no
3 thanks at all for it. And if you--with all of the
4 campaigning we've had locally and nationally,
5 veterans never came up. The President without
6 authority of the consti--strike that--without the
7 declaration of war has said he's sending 1,600 more
8 troops to become veterans. It never came up. I
9 don't know what to tell you, Reverend, but unless we
10 can find some way to get a satisfaction that we're
11 not paid for politically or monetarily, then poor
12 folks and veterans have very little hope, very little
13 hope, and the older I get, the more I'm influenced
14 than in a few years I'm going to have to explain what
15 I did since I was born. So that's an incentive
16 enough for me to say, you know, give me a break, but
17 quite frankly, the City Council can say drop off food
18 to my office for a veteran. God knows, literally God
19 knows, this should be a wave, and get rid of it, and
20 to get out there to partisan fighting like we're
21 getting at, but we should have a way for everyone to
22 say take care of these warriors first, then we can
23 deal with the rest of it. So, there's no magic pill
24 except the great things that our country enjoy, we

2 just found it so easy to forget. There weren't
3 always sounds [sic] without a fight.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
5 much, Congressman.

6 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Council
8 Member Vallone?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you to the
10 Co-Chairs, and to our esteemed Congress Member, I
11 could dare say I think you're wrong. I think you have
12 had a conversation with God, and I think today we
13 have all heard the benefit of that conversation. Your
14 words are very powerful and coming from one who is
15 rooted in faith as my father goes to church everyday
16 and I take that with me, and sometimes we are scorned
17 for that when we talk of the importance of it. Never
18 give up that fight. And today we stand in honor of
19 the veterans every day. So, you're words mean much
20 to all of us, to those in the audience listening, and
21 I do believe it is a new day here not only on the
22 local level but federal and state, and behind you is
23 our new Brigadier General Commissioner of MOVA, Loree
24 Sutton, and she too brings a brand new perspective to
25 what the Mayor's Administration and what the Council

2 can do together. She stood with me at the 77th
3 regimen at Fort Totten as the names were read of
4 those who passed just this year, and it was very
5 moving and we were humbled by the respect, the men
6 and the women who served there gave to us with being
7 there, and she gave a very strong commitment, and so
8 I think and I can pledge to you myself and I'm sure
9 our fellow Council Members, we are going to do
10 everything we can do address these issues.

11 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Well, I'm so glad to
12 hear that General Sutton is here so that I can thank
13 her accepting--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
15 She's hiding behind you.

16 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Well, I recognize
17 that, but one of the joys that I also get out of
18 being a congressman is that when I was a sergeant, no
19 general ever stood up when I walked in the room when
20 I was in the Army, and I just--it's just a pleasure
21 to meet her here again. Thank you so much all, and I
22 look forward to thanking the General here, and
23 needless to say that we got a lot of good people in
24 the Congress. They just have to be shaken up, and no
25 one can shake up people better than the great people

2 of the City and State of New York, and so even though
3 things politically look bad, you all have to agree no
4 matter what people's party label really are, the
5 issues that are going to make America continue to be
6 great have not been discussed yet, and they have to
7 be discussed in the next three years. It's not a
8 question of a handful of people just saying no. It
9 will have to be discussed, and you all will be there
10 in the struggle to make certain that we support those
11 issues. So, thank you for the great honor, and I'll
12 see you guys back home.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Congressman,
14 actually, we do have one, sorry, one--Council Member
15 Ruben Wills.

16 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Good to see you in
17 person.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: How are you
19 Congressman? I just have a couple of things I wanted
20 to ask you, but Chair Ulrich, I tweeted out that you
21 were an altar boy, and that is now trending on Yahoo.
22 It's a big deal evidently. Congressman, you know,
23 I've always followed you and respected you. My
24 family, actually, when they moved to Georgia, that
25 was their first time voting, and they voted for you

2 that first election. I wanted to ask you two
3 questions. In Phoenix, there was a homeless project
4 that was very successful, and in the articles that
5 were printed in the New York Times, they mentioned
6 something that you mentioned, how a lot of these
7 gentleman fall into this state upon their discharge
8 or leaving the military. Is there a program that you
9 know of that we could model something after or a
10 program that we can develop with your help and others
11 like you that would be able to begin to bridge that
12 time from discharge to try to avoid or mitigate some
13 of those issues that would bring them to that state?
14 And two, I know some veterans personally that we have
15 seen symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder that
16 they exhibit, but there's something inside of a
17 veteran that said that does not want to go get
18 disability, they don't want to go get the programs
19 that are open to them. Is there a way or is there
20 something that we can also develop that would help us
21 reach out to them that suffer from these things and
22 substance abuse so it doesn't conflict with their
23 pride, the things that they've learned in the
24 military, but to let them know that this is something
25 that is owed to them, something that we want to do to

2 make sure that they continue being the great citizens
3 that they were once?

4 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Let me take the last
5 question first, because there are avenues already in
6 existence where before discharge you are advised
7 about your rights as a veteran and things you're
8 supposed to do, and what I'm saying, that is nothing
9 compared to what you're saying that's needed. It's
10 not just veterans that have pride. There are
11 veterans, I mean, there are people that ill that
12 can't admit what they don't know. They don't know
13 that having emotional and mental disturbances is just
14 having like a heart disease or lung disease or any
15 other disability because society has not treated that
16 with the same type of sophistication, but boy, let me
17 tell you, when you want to get discharged out of the
18 military, you are tools of those people that are
19 there. You will do whatever they tell you to do to
20 get out to get that piece of paper, and when they
21 tell you you're not prepared to be discharged yet,
22 that you need healthcare, you need training, you need
23 to be able to stand on your feet and not become a
24 charge against society; in military that's all we've
25 ever done is listen to people tell us what to do. But

2 once you let them out, then you cannot put that genie
3 so swiftly back into the bottle to take care of it.

4 Yes, the mechanism will be where every city

5 commission, every state commission get on DOD and

6 tell them, "This is what you've done in taking kids

7 and making them warriors. Damn it, make them

8 healthy, responsive citizens." The first part of

9 your question dealt with a project that was in

10 Wyoming [sic] wherever. We can't do what the

11 military can do. When you get that discharge in your

12 hand, you can tell the world, "Leave me alone, I'm

13 okay." What you can do in the mil--and you can't get

14 kids to do what they will do in the military either.

15 You can't get them to do it in school, but if all of

16 those that love and appreciate what should be done

17 within the military, it's already set up. They just

18 don't do it. They don't spend the time. They don't

19 spend the money, but they owe it to the veterans to

20 make them whole. And so, yes, it works. You,

21 everybody here knows that would work. It even worked

22 when non-veterans at Rikers Island. You teach

23 someone how to earn a living and have some pride, you

24 don't have the type of senseless shootings and

25 killing with people that have families to love and

2 places to live. But we're talking now about veterans
3 especially, because you've already trained them once.
4 All you have to do is train them again. So, yes,
5 there's something we can do. Encourage the city,
6 since New York City is so involved in national policy
7 and so is our state, and you're so involved in making
8 certain that city officials are paid. Tell them when
9 you go to Washington, and I tell you that we got the
10 best person in Hagel as the Secretary, one, because
11 he's a former Sergeant which means his intellect is
12 far higher than most people in the military, but
13 Chuck Hagel is a good man, and he understands. You
14 don't have to educate him about what it's like to
15 learn how to kill. You should never learn how to do
16 it. It's a rough things, and unfortunately, when you
17 get to know guns and they tell you have to sleep with
18 your gun and it's not a sexual connotation, it's one
19 of love, you carry that love with you for weapons
20 outside. Something ought to break up that
21 relationship when you're discharged, before you're
22 discharged. So, we all can help by anybody that you
23 know in Washington. Just grab one of them and shake
24 them and anyone that goes to Washington, Mayors,
25 Commissioners, Governors, State Legislators, because

2 there's no one speaking for that addict, homeless guy
3 in the gutter that used to be somebody. He or she
4 used to be a hero, and that's where all of us can do
5 just this little bit. There's no profile to
6 encourage. It helps us all. It helps the country.
7 It's the right thing to do. And I know it's going to
8 be done, and that's why I cannot over emphasize the
9 strong feeling that I have, and on the even on
10 Veterans Day and a few days before Thanksgiving, you
11 public servants have taken the time to focus
12 attention to this when you know you're not going to
13 make New York one. I mean, this is not a popular
14 political thing to talk about, but you're doing it,
15 and I can't thank you enough.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,
17 Congressman. And I just want to say how meaningful
18 and important it is for our country's veterans to
19 know that they have a friend and an advocate in
20 Congress, and I thank you very much for that.

21 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Thank you, Chairman.
22 Thank you all of you.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you,
24 Congressman, thank you very much. Thank you.

25 [applause]

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We are now going to
3 hear from the Administration and the new appointed
4 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veteran
5 Affairs. Doctor Loree Sutton is here to testify
6 along with the Assistant Commissioner Iris Rodriguez.
7 So I would ask them to come to the dais. And we will
8 have the Committee Counsel swear in the Commissioner
9 and the Assistant Commissioner.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Mr. Chairman, I was
11 going to say the dog stole my testimony, but not
12 quite there. We'll be with you in just one moment.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
14 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
15 in your testimony before this committee and to
16 respond honestly to Council Member questions? If
17 everyone could just swear in. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Please, at your
19 leisure, proceed with your testimony. Thank you,
20 General.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, thanks.
22 Thank you so much. First of all, let me just
23 recognize Congressman Rangel for his leadership, for
24 his inspiration, for his fearless, tireless advocacy
25 on behalf of all of our veterans and their loved

2 ones. We owe him a debt of gratitude, unendingly so.

3 Good afternoon, Chairman Ulrich, Chairman Levin,

4 members of the City Council Committee on Veterans and

5 the City Council Committee on General Welfare. My

6 name is Loree Sutton, and it is my privilege to serve

7 as Commissioner to the Mayor's Office of Veterans

8 Affairs. Thank you for this opportunity to

9 participate in today's hearing on ending veteran

10 homelessness and hunger in New York City. First, I

11 would like to say happy birthday to any Marines and

12 Marine Corps veterans attending today's hearing. The

13 United States Marine Corps is celebrating 239 years

14 of service to our nation today. Ooh-rah, and Semper

15 Fi. Also, an early Veterans Day. Happy Veterans day

16 to all who have served and who are still serving, all

17 components, all generations, all warriors, and yes,

18 their loved ones. We are blessed. I hope you will

19 all join us, whether in person or in spirit as we

20 march up Fifth Avenue tomorrow, honoring the service

21 of our nation's veterans. Today's topic of

22 homelessness and hunger for our veterans is timely

23 and critical. Now, we know there are many reasons

24 accounting for veterans who are going through these

25 issues across the country and across our city,

2 whether it be post-traumatic stress, military sexual
3 trauma, substance abuse, social isolation and
4 unemployment to name a few, some of the factors that
5 contribute to veteran homelessness. It's not just
6 about finding a place to live. It's about having
7 access to supportive services and a supportive
8 community, working in partnership. It is so critical
9 to maintaining health, a sense of home, a place to be
10 and people to share one's success with. Since 2008,
11 New York City has had a partnership with the United
12 States Department of Veterans Affairs, and the United
13 States Department of Housing and Urban Development.
14 This partnership formed the Housing Urban Development
15 Veterans Affairs Supporting Housing Program, better
16 known as HUD-VASH. This program provides vouchers to
17 eligible homeless veterans across our city and other
18 program for eligible veterans and their families from
19 the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. It
20 is the Supportive Services for Veterans Families
21 program, also known as SSVF. This particular program
22 uses its grants to help veteran families from
23 becoming homeless and also to help in rapid
24 rehousing, assisting veteran families already
25 homeless to obtain their own housing. Veteran

2 constituents come to MOVA for assistance in a variety
3 of ways, walk-ins, telephone calls, postal mail,
4 emails, referrals from families, friends, veterans
5 and community based organizations and elected
6 officials. If a veteran comes to MOVA and is street
7 homeless or in need of rental arears assistance, we
8 connect them with Project Torch, 40 Flatbush,
9 extension eighth floor in Brooklyn for the assessment
10 that they may receive the assistance through the HUD-
11 VASH or SSVF program, the assistance that they have
12 earned. If a veteran is not eligible for VA
13 services, they are linked to the proper New York City
14 Department of Homeless Services Shelter Intake
15 Center. And my colleague Assistant Commissioner Iris
16 Rodriguez from the Department of Homeless Services is
17 flanking me today to address this important issue.
18 MOVA then keeps in touch with the veteran and his or
19 her family members throughout this process. In
20 assessing the needs of veterans who come to MOVA for
21 assistance, if it is found through their assessment
22 that they are in need of assistance for getting food
23 for themselves, their families, MOVA connects them
24 directly with the New York City Human Resources
25 Administration Job Income Center in their area to

2 apply for cash assistance and Supplemental Nutrition
3 Assistance Program or SNAP benefits. HRA also
4 provides income eligible veterans information on food
5 pantries and community kitchens. Information for
6 this and other services can be accessed through
7 Access NYC. There is also a link to this portal on
8 the MOVA website at NYC.gov/veterans. In summary,
9 MOVA remains committed to ensuring that New York City
10 veterans and their loved ones receive the best public
11 and private resources New York City has to offer.
12 Much progress has been made. Much more remains. Thank
13 you again for this opportunity to meet with you
14 today. I look forward to continuing our work together
15 on behalf of all New York City veterans and their
16 families. I now welcome your comments and questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you,
18 Commissioner Sutton. Does the Deputy Commissioner
19 wish to testify as well or to add anything to Doctor
20 Sutton's testimony?

21 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, hello, and good
22 afternoon Chairman Ulrich and Levin, and the members
23 of the General Welfare and Veterans Committee. My
24 name is Iris Rodriguez and I am the Assistant
25 Commissioner for Adult Families and Veterans Affairs

2 at the Department of Homeless Service. Thank you for
3 the opportunity to testify this afternoon. I am
4 pleased to be testifying today along colleagues from
5 the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs which partners
6 with the THS in many of our efforts to provide stable
7 housing and resources for our city's homeless
8 veterans population. This agency last testified on
9 this matter three years ago and spoke at that time
10 not only about our shelter facilities and service
11 centers for homeless veterans, but also about the
12 increased efforts in street outreach and prevention
13 to provide a needy service to this population. Today,
14 as we approach Veterans Day, a day to honor the
15 service and accomplishment of those who defend our
16 nation, I am happy to report on the progress the city
17 has made in this very important endeavor. Today,
18 approximately 210,000 veterans are living in New York
19 City, 1,300 of which are homeless. Seven hundred
20 reside in DHS shelters, 500 in VA grant per-diem
21 programs, and 100 are in the street. Since 2007,
22 this agency has successfully placed over 6,500
23 homeless veterans into housing, including 850 through
24 the HUD-VASH program, which provides rental vouchers
25 and VA case management service to the most vulnerable

2 veterans. I am heartened to report that veteran
3 homeless in New York City has declined by 64 percent
4 since 2011, an achievement for which the New York
5 City continuum of care is the lead agency and who
6 which was recognized this past Wednesday, November
7 5th by the National Alliance to end homelessness as
8 part of the Never Another Homeless Veteran Campaign.
9 These achievements are founded upon a longstanding
10 partnership between DHS, MOVA and the Federal
11 Department of Veterans Affairs to provide
12 comprehensive services to veterans living in New York
13 City. As you know, within DHS portfolio, we operate
14 in conjunction with the Mayor's Office of Veterans
15 Affairs and the VA, a veteran's multiservice center
16 in downtown Brooklyn, which houses DHS veteran
17 service unit as well as two transitional housing
18 facilities dedicated specifically for veterans, which
19 is the Borden Avenue Veterans Residency and the
20 Porter Avenue Veterans Residency. In addition, we
21 have two city-owned supportive housing programs.
22 Moreover, the agency continues its robust street
23 outreach program and home based prevention service
24 that focus on moving veterans into stable living
25 situations. I will now describe in each of these

2 facility and programs in greater detail as well as
3 highlight new efforts by this Administration to
4 address and strengthen service for veterans homeless.

5 In 2008, DHS and MOVA, in conjunction with the VA,
6 collaborated to open a multi-service center in
7 downtown Brooklyn, a VA-run Chapel Street Veteran
8 Health Center in Brooklyn. Within this center, DHS
9 and the VA have joint staff and service unit. The
10 VSu, a national model, functions as a single point of
11 access dedicated to serving homeless veterans by
12 connecting them to VA service and benefits, as well
13 as assisting and obtaining housing, employment,
14 substance abuse and mental health treatment and peer
15 support groups. The New York State VA Office and the
16 Human Resource Administration for Veterans Center as
17 also co-located inside this multi-service center to
18 provide ease and efficiency of service. When
19 necessary, VSU staff refers homeless veterans to one
20 of our two DHS short term veterans residency, Borden
21 Avenue and Porter Avenue. The Borden Avenue Veteran
22 Residency in Long Island City, Queens provides
23 transitional housing for 215 males and 28 female
24 veterans. With Institute for Living for Community
25 Living serving as this provider, Borden Avenue begun

2 operating in 2008 as a VA grant per-diem program
3 which funds transitional housing for up to 24 months.

4 As many of the veterans referred to Borden have
5 medical or mental health needs, the residence has a
6 nurse practitioner and clinical personnel on staff as
7 well as an article 28 clinic adjacent to the
8 building, which provides medical and dental service
9 to our veterans and to residents in the community.

10 These programs offer assistance to our veterans who
11 suffer from clinical disorders including PTSD,
12 traumatic brain injuries, sexual trauma and others.

13 Borden also retains a full time VA social worker
14 onsite to provide seamless coordination between the
15 VA and DHS. The Porter Avenue residency is located
16 in Bushwick, Brooklyn, and it provides temporary
17 housing for 138 male veterans. The site is operated
18 by the Doe Fund, and it opened its doors in 2009. It
19 also began as a VA grant per-diem program. Porter
20 residents have the option of participating in the Doe
21 Fund's Ready, Willing and Able Program, a nine to 12
22 month program providing education and vocational
23 training, computer instructions, relapse prevention
24 and job development. A VA social worker is also
25 stationed at this residency to provide seamless

2 continuation of care amongst the provider, DHS and
3 VA. Both Borden and Porter have onsite certificate
4 based culinary programs for their veterans. Those
5 who participate are trained to receive food handling
6 [sic] certificates and are responsible for the
7 preparation of every meal and special events held on
8 and off site. Both sites also work collaborating
9 with HRA's Child Support Initiative to reduce the
10 barriers of our noncustodial veteran parents. In
11 addition to the short term housing options described,
12 some homeless veterans are eligible to receive HUD-
13 VASH section eight vouchers. Service provider refers
14 clients to the reissue unit, which in turn refers
15 veterans to one of the city's VA medical centers,
16 which assess client's eligibility. Upon the VA's
17 determination of eligibility, the New York City
18 Housing Authority and the New York City Department of
19 Housing Preservation, HPD, administer the vouchers to
20 our veterans, and with this, they can move into
21 public or subsidized housing or up to housing in the
22 private market. By pairing rental subsidies with VA
23 supported case management service, HUD-VASH vouchers
24 keep veterans in their home. This program has been
25 successful to date, and we have over 900 DHS veterans

2 who have been issued vouchers in New York City. DHS
3 also funds social service at two city-owned Volunteer
4 of America operated SRO's, strictly designed for
5 veterans. These programs, the Commonwealth located in
6 the Bronx and 119th Street Veterans Residency located
7 in Harlem provide needy stability to veterans through
8 the provision of case management service at these
9 locations. Through these services, VAO [sic] staff
10 links residents to employment, mental health, and
11 substance abuse service and other resources as
12 appropriate. Through its program's oversight, DHS
13 conducts two full program review per year, one
14 announced and one unannounced to address VOA's
15 performance on program issues such as clinical
16 intervention and case management. During these
17 reviews, DHS interviews tenants, monitors case
18 records to ensure service delivery, and also assists
19 building conditions to ensure the highest quality of
20 care and service. And in response to recent concerns
21 expressed by residents, we plan to increase the
22 frequency of these reviews and to arrange inspection
23 by DHS maintenance and repair unit at each of these
24 buildings to assess the infrastructure need and to
25 establish capital funding priorities. We also plan to

2 increase our VA's tracking and monitoring of all
3 tenant's complaint. Next, DHS coordinates supportive
4 and preventive service to homeless veterans within
5 its system through the Supportive Service for
6 Veterans Families program, he SSVF. SSVF provides
7 supportive service designated to promote housing
8 stability, including access to benefit, cash
9 assistance, housing court advocacy, job training and
10 employment to low income veteran families or
11 individuals either residing in shelter or
12 transitioning to permanent housing. SSVF operates a
13 housing first model, and it can provide up to five
14 months of rental assistance to stabilize housing and
15 prevent eviction. This fiscal year, the VA awarded
16 SSVF 22.66 million dollars to fund seven non for
17 profit social service organizations in New York. A
18 taskforce compromising of DHS, the VA, and SSVF
19 provider work diligently to identify those who can
20 benefit from rapid rehousing with the ultimate goal
21 of having SSVF providers perform outreach in our DHS
22 shelters and to assist our veterans in returning to
23 the community. The New York City Coalition on the
24 Continuum of Care of which DHS is the lead agency
25 established a veteran's taskforce on October 18th,

2 2013. Co-led by DHS and the VA, the coalition also
3 includes representatives from city agencies, HPD, HRA
4 and NYCHA, as well as Supportive Housing Network of
5 New York, Help USA, Volunteers of America, Service
6 for the Underserved, the Jericho Project, Corporation
7 for Service Housing and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans
8 of America. In support of this value initiative, the
9 taskforce, one, analyze the gap in service provided
10 by the VA and develop planning to close this gap by
11 maximizing and coordinating access to resource,
12 particularly, for those deemed ineligible for VA
13 service and benefit. Two, it creates a point of
14 contact to spearhead forthcoming VA resources and to
15 maximize the participation in the 25 cities campaign,
16 and three, it engaged seven SSVF providers in the
17 city to coordinate homeless prevention and rapid
18 rehousing resources provided through the VA, SSVF
19 grants program. Through the taskforce, we have been
20 able to reduce the bottlenecks among the various
21 government entities, providing service and benefits
22 and provide faster service delivery to our veterans.
23 Of note, the Executive Committee of the taskforce
24 also serves as the leadership committee for the group
25 of Mission Home. DHS and VA launched the 25 city

2 initiative for New York City, also as Mission Home,
3 which seeks to end veteran homelessness in the city.

4 The initiative began on June 10th, 2014, an event
5 attended by over 100 partners from the federal, state
6 and city agencies, community leaders and other
7 stakeholders. Since that date, we have highlighted a
8 coordinated assessment tool called the Reeps [sic]
9 Adapt [sic]. SSVF providers have screened over 125
10 homeless veterans living in homeless shelters in
11 grant per-diem programs throughout the city. The goal
12 of the coordinated assessment tool is to help clients
13 move faster into permanent housing and to improve the
14 collection of data and information about what kind of
15 services our clients need. We continue to evaluate
16 the effectiveness of this assessment tool and will
17 make changes as necessary to improve this initiative.

18 As part of this process to expedite the return of
19 homeless veterans into housing, DHS also convenes
20 weekly case conferences to ensure veterans receive
21 housing intervention customized to their needs and
22 are provided with assistance overcoming bureaucratic
23 barriers to benefit. DHS also will be sponsoring
24 housing fairs for homeless veterans and planning a
25 training for staff on veteran-specific resources and

2 how to access them. Finally, last year, we began a
3 partnership with the Robin Hood Foundation to combat
4 chronic street homeless amongst New York City
5 veterans population. The Robin Hood Foundation
6 provided a grant to three DHS street outreach teams,
7 the Manhattan Outreach Consortium, Common Ground and
8 BRC to fund veteran-specific outreach workers who
9 assist in removing veterans from the street into
10 transitional and permanent housing. In part, due to
11 this generous grant, there are now fewer than 100
12 chronically homeless in the street. As street
13 outreach and team assist in obtaining HUD-VASH, New
14 York, New York Supportive Housing, as well as
15 placement into safe haven and stabilization beds.
16 This remarkable number is down roughly by 20 percent
17 from 120 last year. We have also partnered closely
18 with the VA and have done joint outreach with them to
19 some of the most chronic and vulnerable veterans
20 living in our streets. In conclusion, DHS is proud
21 to report today on its significant reduction and
22 veteran homeless over the past year. we could not
23 have achieved this without our federal partners, the
24 Veterans Administration and the Department of Housing
25 and Urban Development, our city partners, the Mayor's

2 Office of Veterans Affairs, the New York City Housing
3 Authority, the Human Resource Administration and the
4 Department of Housing Preservation and Development
5 and our community based partners, the Doe Fund,
6 Institute for Community Living, Help USA, Samaritan
7 Village, Service for the Underserved, Volunteers for
8 America, Black Veterans of Social Justice and the
9 Jericho Project. We would also like to thank and
10 take a moment to recognize our former DHS
11 Commissioner, Robert V. Hess who passed away this
12 past winter in his valiant efforts to reduce veteran
13 homelessness in the city. A veteran himself,
14 Commissioner Hess led the opening to the re-issue
15 Borden and Porter Avenue Shelters, as well as the
16 development of the various initiatives I have
17 discussed today, and the city would not have made the
18 progress it has without his initiative and
19 leadership. He is missed not only by this agency,
20 but also by the city's veterans. We strive to
21 continue building upon our model of care in order to
22 end homeless veterans in the city, and additionally,
23 we are committed to ensuring that our veterans reside
24 in safe and comfortable environments, and as such,
25 we'll continue to work and address their concerns at

2 individual facilities, and I thank you for holding
3 this hearing on such an important issue and bringing
4 this attention to this initiative, and I welcome your
5 questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
7 Commissioners. So I'm going to lead off with a
8 couple of questions, and then I'll turn it over to my
9 colleagues, and then I may have some additional
10 questions after that. Let's see. Bear with me for
11 one moment here. So Commissioner Rodriguez, I wanted
12 to delve in a little bit on the reduction in the
13 census issue, which is remarkable, but I'm--to be
14 honest with you, I'm trying to get my head around
15 exactly how at a time when we are seeing an increase
16 in the census, the homeless census across the city in
17 all manners for single adults, for families without
18 children and especially families with children, we
19 would see such a dramatic decrease in a single year
20 for one specific population. So if you could take me
21 a little bit through some of the numbers here. So,
22 in 2013 we had 3,000--let's see. Hold on one moment.
23 We went from over, was it 3,600? Let's see. Excuse
24 me. In 20--where's the number here? It was--sorry.
25 Over 3,000--the decrease was about 53 percent. It

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2 went from around 3,700 to 1,600. In the 2013
3 numbers, first off can you give us a breakdown of at
4 that time how many were in shelter and how many were
5 unsheltered or living in the streets?

6 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, I think you're
7 talking about the point in time which we report to
8 the federal government.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

10 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: That number was 1,645.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In 2014, in January--

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] 14, yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In January 20--I want
14 to take one step back here and look at the numbers in
15 January 2013.

16 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, in 2013 it was a
17 little bit over 3,000, and that's when we put
18 together this collaborate effort with the VA and city
19 partners and not for profit where we were targeting
20 and focusing it. I think the numbers--sorry.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can relax [sic],
22 sorry.

23 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: It was. So we had a
24 reduction of 54 from that time to--

25

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Right,
3 right, and so I'm just--

4 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] 600 [sic].

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So let's take it one
6 step back here. For the homeless veterans in January
7 2013, and that number was for the record here, and
8 I'm just trying to--no, no. It's over--

9 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] Three
10 thousand three--a little bit over 3,000 I think it
11 is.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, 3,000-- I
13 apologize. Okay, so the number is--

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] It's about
15 3,000.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Three thousand--the
17 exact number here, I'm sorry? Do we have the exact
18 number? Sorry, okay. So that number was--if we
19 could that exact number. So at point in time,
20 January 2013, 3,000--

21 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] It was a
22 little bit over 3,000.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Three thousand six
24 hundred forty-seven, is that correct?

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: I wouldn't--I don't have
3 those numbers exactly in front of me, but I know it
4 was a little bit over 3,000 in the point of time in
5 2013. The point in time in 2014, it's 1,645.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. So, point in
7 time, 2013, how does that break down? How many of
8 those were in shelter, how many of those were out of
9 shelter?

10 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: I cannot give you the
11 breakdown of the 2013. I am not familiar with that
12 exact breakdown. I could provide it to you once we
13 get back to our office and give you exactly how that
14 breaks down between unsheltered and sheltered.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, and then do we
16 have also that breakdown in terms of the number of
17 whom were men and women?

18 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Yes, we do. We can
19 provide you that information as well.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

21 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: For the 2013, you're
22 talking about?

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I--2013 numbers.

24 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Singles versus--

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] Singles
3 versus families with children versus adult families,
4 which is our three population.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Also, can you provide
6 a breakdown for which conflict or era those veterans
7 served?

8 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: That's going to be a
9 little more difficult.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Or the age perhaps,
11 the age of the veteran?

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: We can give you age.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Because--okay.
14 So, in the course of 12 months we get from 3,600 down
15 to 1,600, so a decrease of 53 percent or 2,000.
16 Where--do we have a detailed breakdown of where each
17 of those individuals went, how they--because we have
18 here the DHS data dashboard for which gives us the
19 single adult veterans shelter exits into permanent
20 housing, those that are remaining out for more than
21 30 days, correct?

22 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Uh-hm.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And in that data, and
24 this goes to March 2014 was the last month that that
25 data's available, there are 555 exits into permanent

2 housing in fiscal year '14 up 'til March of 2014.

3 That was compared to 567 in the prior fiscal year to
4 date of 2013. So that was a decrease of two percent,
5 which is, you know, that's not significant, but if
6 we're seeing that the number of veterans, single
7 adult veterans exiting into permanent housing for
8 more than 30 days was roughly on track from where it
9 was the previous year, I then have trouble accounting
10 for this vast decrease in the 13 to 14 versus 12 to
11 13. Do you fol--so, do we have then a detailed
12 accounting of where those 2,000 individuals, what
13 housing situation they are then now in?

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, we could probably
15 get you--we will be able to get you the data.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

17 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: We know where most of the
18 folks moved, whether it be through HUD-VASH or
19 whether it be through supporting housing or whether
20 it be doubling up on things. So we would probably
21 have to get you that information in terms of--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Okay, we
23 don't have that today?

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: No, I don't have that
3 number with me right now, the difference, where they
4 went from 2013 and 2014.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So we don't know how
6 many HUD-VASH were then given out during that time
7 period?

8 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Well, we know the
9 allocation that was given to New York City at that
10 time, but overall folks do not move only through HUD-
11 VASH, but VASH is just one of the ways our veterans
12 move into permanent housing. We also have New York,
13 New York Three, and we also have partners with
14 private organizations where they create specific
15 housing for our veterans.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But you
17 understand that I'm---so we really need that data.
18 We--

19 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] We'll get
20 the data. We'll have to get the data.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, because--so
22 when we're talking about 2,000 fewer homeless
23 veterans in 2014 versus 2013, all of those 2,000 are
24 in permanent housing is that correct?

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: They're in some type of
3 sort of housing, whether it be transitional housing,
4 whether it be permanent housing, or whether it be
5 with family reunification.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. We really,
7 honestly, I am glad to see that that number is out
8 there. I would like clearer data to show exactly
9 where all of those individuals went, on what type of
10 permanent housing they are in, because any time you
11 see a decrease in a single 12 month period of a 54
12 percent of a population, you know, it's reasonable to
13 ask where exactly they're going. I realize that
14 there are additional, there are federal resources
15 have been involved here. Do we have, just going back
16 to say 12 to 13--so I'm looking at--I want to look at
17 a historic trend here, what the decrease was from 12
18 to 13? So, if 13 to 14 was 54 percent, what 12 to 13
19 was?

20 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: From currently up to
21 date, I know when the point in time of 2014 was 1,645
22 'til today we are at roughly 1,300, so.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so there's been
24 an additional decrease of 300 from January 14 to
25

2 today. What I'm wondering what was the number back
3 in January of 2012?

4 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: I don't have that data
5 with me.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

7 CAMILLE RIVERA: Sorry, Deputy
8 Commissioner Camille Rivera. We can get you that
9 data for 2012 and 2013. What I do want to add is
10 that I think that because of the investment from for
11 the last several years on Veterans Affairs and ending
12 homelessness within veterans from investment from the
13 federal government, investments within the
14 Administrations and even the previous Administration,
15 I think that's why you see such a drastic decrease.
16 And so, I think what we can do is definitely break
17 down that information for you, but I think because of
18 the, you know, VASH, all the other kind of programs
19 that have come up, the supportive housing pieces,
20 those are very important pieces, and I think that's
21 why we need more supportive housing and more
22 opportunities for transitional housing so that we can
23 be able to lower the numbers even more.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, I understand.
25 It's, but honestly, I mean, we really do need to see

2 some clear data as to--I mean, we should be able to
3 be tracking each and every one of these individuals
4 and finding out what form of permanent housing they
5 are now in. So, in terms of the veteran specific
6 shelters, and there are two Borden and Borden Avenue,
7 Porter Avenue and the two others that you had
8 mentioned, what is the maximum capacity for veteran
9 specific shelters?

10 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Porter has 138 beds
11 specifically for men, and Borden has altogether 243,
12 28 are designated for female beds, and the other 215
13 are for men.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

15 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, roughly 400 and
16 something specifically veterans bed are designated
17 for in our system.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. How often are
19 the veteran specific shelters at full capacity?

20 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: They are at full
21 capacity with the exception of the females. Our 138
22 Porter Residency is full and so is our 215 bed at
23 Borden. The 28 that are for females are not. That's
24 something we've historically never filled. We don't
25 have that many female veterans come and apply through

2 our front door. So, we've designated a specific wing
3 for them, 28 of which this morning we only had 15
4 females vets occupying them.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, are there then
6 veterans that are within the general population
7 shelter system?

8 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Yes, there is.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many in single
10 adults throughout the--do you know the number how
11 many are single adults and how many are in families?

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Family has less than
13 100. I think--families has less than 100, maybe 70
14 families with children. Families without any
15 children we have less than 40. I think it's like 30
16 something in their numbers, and then outside Borden
17 and Porter we have another 200 plus folks.
18 Altogether for a total of 700 through our system.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Would DHS deem that
20 there is a need for another additional veteran
21 shelters, veteran-specific shelters?

22 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: We can. There's roughly
23 200 something outside Borden and Porter. So, if we
24 needed to look into them. The only thing is because
25 the service that they may have, a lot of the veterans

2 actually that are outside Borden and Porter happen to
3 stay more in our assessment and rapid re-housing vets
4 because we work with SSVF, which is our prevention
5 thing. So we hold them in assessment, and then they
6 work with moving them into transitional housing form
7 the front end rather than placing them at the end.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And the transitional
9 housing options are?

10 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: With the VA.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Which is grant per-diem,
13 or even into permanent housing depending on the need
14 that the veteran has. If they're coming with
15 employment or with some skills, usually was SSVF does
16 is they have a first, housing first model, they'll
17 put them in an apartment, and then they'll work with
18 this veteran to get them employed or secure
19 employment some sort of housing for them. But their
20 approach again is first housing first model. They'll
21 put them in an apartment. They'll pay up to five
22 months' rent, and then work with them on how to
23 continue that payment.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And there may--the
25 HUD-VASH voucher could be through that process or?

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: That--those are for
3 folks that we're trying to prevent or doing rapid-
4 rehousing. Those are the ones that are coming from
5 the front. The HUD-VASH, we are doing it for the
6 folks that are already in shelter and have some time
7 in shelter.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So you couldn't
9 qualify for a HUD-VASH voucher if you are at risk of
10 becoming homeless, not if you're already in the--you
11 have to be already within the system?

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: You can. It depends. We
13 leave that to the VA to make that decision, because
14 in order to qualify for the HUD-VASH you have to meet
15 the definition of the HUD, which means you have to
16 have at least 365 days of homelessness or you have to
17 have four episodes within three years.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see.

19 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, if that person has
20 had in and out of shelter, that can qualify, but they
21 make that decision and determination. So that's why
22 we refer to them and we let them make that decision,
23 but many times, yes, we have folks that get HUD-VASH
24 and do not even have to come into shelter.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, HUD-VASH then,
3 the agency, the lead agency that determines whether
4 HUD-VASH voucher is issued is the VA and not DHS, or
5 can DHS do that on their own?

6 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: DHS is the one that
7 gives the days in shelter and refers them to the VA.
8 The VA then makes a decision whether they are
9 medically eligible or they have a service need. It's
10 not only giving you a housing voucher. It's also
11 what service needs you have. So, it's a combination
12 of giving you a rental subsidy with addition case
13 management that will follow you for up to five years
14 while you're in shelter.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I just have one more
16 question and then I'll turn it over to my colleague.

17 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In your testimony you
19 said that there are 1,300 homeless veterans out of
20 2010--excuse me, 210,000 veterans, 1,300 of whom are
21 homeless, 700 residing in DHS shelters.

22 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: That includes the ones
23 in Borden and Porter, those 700.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Five hundred
25 in the VA's grant per-diem.

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2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Grant per-diem program.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And 100 on the
4 street, that equals 1,300, and then you said there
5 are about 1,300 veterans residing in transitional
6 housing of which 700 are in DHS shelters. So then
7 that 1,300 is in addition to the 1,300 that--

8 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] No, I--

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] are
10 being homeless?

11 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: I realize--

12 CAMILLE RIVERA: Council Member, sorry,
13 that was a typo on my behalf.

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: A typo.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

16 CAMILLE RIVERA: Correct the record,
17 please. So the--

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Can
19 you provide the correct numbers, please?

20 CAMILLE RIVERA: Sure, the first sentence
21 is correct. There's 1,300 total, 700 in DHS
22 shelters, 500 in the VA's grant per-diem program.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And 100 on the
24 street?

25 CAMILLE RIVERA: Yes, correct.

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, and then what
4 is the--what's the number of veterans residing in
5 transitional housing then?

6 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So 700 are in shelter
7 with us. That includes Borden and Porter.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it, okay.

9 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Five hundred are in
10 transitional housing, which is the grant per-diem
11 program.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, I see, okay. Five
13 hundred is the transitional housing.

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

16 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: And then 100 is the
17 street folks.

18 CAMILLE RIVERA: We were trying to
19 clarify what transitional housing would be.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see. Okay, thank
21 you, and I'll turn it over to my colleague, Chair
22 Eric Ulrich.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council
24 Member Levin. So, I have a very difficult time
25 sitting here listening to the Administration

2 testifying about what a wonderful job you're doing
3 helping all the homeless veterans in the city when
4 there's still thousands of them sleeping on streets
5 and in subways and everywhere else and choosing not
6 to go--

7 [applause]

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: No, applause
9 necessary. There are thousands of veterans who are
10 not in the shelters, who are not in transitional
11 housing, precisely because of articles like the one
12 that appeared in today's Daily News detailing rats,
13 roaches, mice, bed bugs living in 1150 Commonwealth
14 Avenue in the Bronx, for instance. The one Harlem
15 where retired Marines and Army veterans detail
16 horrific stories and living conditions. It's no
17 wonder why there's still--that they're still in the
18 streets, that they're still in the parks, that
19 they're still in the subways. So whatever we're
20 doing obviously isn't very effective. We're
21 obviously not doing a good enough job because the
22 veterans who need help aren't even willing to go for
23 the help that is available to them. Now, we talk
24 about funding, you know, how we're getting all this
25 funding. Well, somebody brought up the Robin Hood

2 grant. MOVA used to get 400,000 dollars I think from
3 the Robin Hood Foundation, and this predates the new
4 Commissioner, this is not directed toward her in any
5 way, but the Administration decided not to replace
6 that money when the Robin Hood money dried up at the
7 end of the summer. And so we're talking about
8 funding and all the funding we put in to connect
9 veterans with social services and help for veterans,
10 it's at historic low. And so all I'm saying is we
11 throw these facts and figures and statistics around.
12 They really don't represent very much, because the
13 reality and the real situation on the street is very
14 different from what's being talked about in this room
15 today. This Administration and to a pretty large
16 extent the previous Administration ought to be
17 ashamed at the little amount of money we spend on
18 veterans. In the 74 billion dollar budget, we only
19 spent 400,000 dollars to fund MOVA, which is grossly
20 underfunded, again for no fault of the new
21 Commissioners, and when it comes to the homelessness
22 statistics it's fuzzy math. They're not even real
23 numbers, because most of the homeless veterans don't
24 even go to you for help, because they don't want to
25 live in those conditions or they don't feel safe in

2 the shelter system. And so, I appreciate your
3 testimony today and for the veterans that did get
4 help, I'm sure that they are better off today than
5 they were the day before they went to you for help,
6 but the purpose of conducting this oversight hearing
7 today is to say number one, we're not doing enough.
8 Number two, we're not doing an adequate job with what
9 we already have. Look at the--read the Daily News
10 article today, talk to the veterans who are sleeping
11 in the subways, and ask them why they're not sleeping
12 in the shelter tonight. And number three, to
13 identify ways that we can do things better, because
14 we can always do things better. Phoenix, Arizona was
15 credited as the first community in the country to end
16 veteran's homelessness as part of the Mayor's
17 challenge to end veteran's homelessness. The City of
18 New York decided to answer President Obama and the
19 First Lady's call to sign onto that campaign to
20 eliminate or drastically reduce the veteran's
21 homeless population in the city by year 2015. We are
22 nowhere near achieving that goal as far as I'm
23 concerned, as far as the statistics according to your
24 own dictate, and so how do we live up to the
25 expectation that we set and the benchmarks that were

2 set by the federal government to address this issue
3 when we're not even doing that with how we're doing
4 things right now? So what I'm saying is not to throw
5 everything out, but whatever we're doing obviously
6 isn't working. Whatever Bloomberg Administration did
7 didn't do a very good job. Whatever this
8 Administration has done in my opinion hasn't done a
9 very good job, and tomorrow's Veterans Day and all
10 the politicians are going to be on Fifth Avenue
11 providing lip service about how they love veterans,
12 they salute veterans, they support veterans, and what
13 we're seeing today on the eve of Veterans Day is
14 that's a lie and it's not true, and we have to do
15 better, and our deeds and our words have to match
16 each other. And so I just want to provide that as a
17 commentary because this is the beginning of a
18 conversation. It is not the end, and we will have as
19 many hearings and press conferences as necessary
20 until the entire city of New York knows the truth,
21 and that is that when it comes to helping veterans
22 who need the help the most, the City of New York
23 doesn't give a damn.

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: For the record,
3 Chairman Ulrich, I respectfully disagree with your
4 assessment.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Does anyone else in
6 the Administration wish to comment?

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I would not have
8 accepted this position, Chairman Ulrich, if I was not
9 convinced that New York City is the city that can and
10 will and is and has and will continue to demonstrate
11 how to best care for our veterans and their loved
12 ones. I would have not accepted this position unless
13 I knew that our Mayor who, for whom, and you know
14 this Chairman Ulrich, this issue is deeply personal.
15 He does give a damn. Everyone on this council, dias,
16 everyone on this room gives a damn. I will tell you
17 this, my commitment to you, Chairman Ulrich, is that
18 we will learn. We will learn from what this city has
19 done so right, not just when it became cool to do so,
20 but far before that, 2007, 2008, the Department of
21 Homeland Services, 2,000 individuals whose job it is
22 under extremely difficult conditions as you will
23 recall, the financial economic conditions that this
24 city and our country have found ourselves in since
25 2008, notwithstanding that has gone from over 3,000

2 homeless veterans to last January 1,600 to now by our
3 best estimate 1,300, and I look forward to seeing you
4 in January of 2015 when we put on our coats and we go
5 out in the streets of New York and we show every
6 single veteran how much we care. Have we done
7 enough? No. Will we continue to renew our effort
8 and commitment learning from all that has brought us
9 here, and by the way, New York City was recognized as
10 one of two cities in the country whose record on
11 ending veteran homelessness has been the tops in the
12 nation. So, I do respectfully disagree with your
13 assessment and I will not allow this to be
14 unaddressed in this city. What we will take from the
15 experience and the dedication of all in this room who
16 care about not just veterans in New York City, but
17 all of our homeless, the 57,000 homeless, let us
18 learn from the successes that we have had in working
19 with veterans with the application of resources at
20 all levels, with the resources to allow us to
21 intervene early to allow us to advocate through
22 whatever changes are necessary at the federal, at the
23 state, at the local level, and let us renew and
24 rededicate our leadership, our commitment to this
25 issue. We are leaders that are recognized across the

2 country and I would say let us at least acknowledge
3 here in this room that we have for however much has
4 come before us and however much has been done, we
5 have much, much work to do on behalf of all of New
6 York City's veterans and homelessness, and let our
7 success on the veteran front lead the way and inform
8 our efforts. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm sorry, can I just--

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] No,
12 hold on. Hold on. That's alright, we'll get to that.
13 The three positions that were funded by the Robin
14 Hood Foundation, the Veteran Service Officers, have
15 these individuals been kept on staff at MOVA?

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, they have not.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, the three
18 counselors that were funded by MOVA, the
19 Administration decided not to supplant that funding,
20 and so those counsels have been removed. So those are
21 three less people helping veterans who need help?

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Chairman Ulrich, I
23 look forward in December when I've completed my 90
24 day assessment and I'm laying down my findings and my

2 recommendations to the Mayor, I look forward to
3 discussing that with you then.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, I'd like to hear
5 from the Department of Homeless Services in what ways
6 specifically does the Administration and the city
7 attempt to achieve the goal by 2015 of ending
8 veterans homelessness? The city signed onto the
9 White House's challenge to end veterans homelessness
10 for Mayors, and we signed on, and I just want to--is
11 there anything specific that we're doing? Anything
12 especially that we're working on?

13 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, the city has been
14 working in collaboration. The city has been working
15 in collaboration with the VA and the not for profit
16 organizations and stakeholders and try to end
17 homeless by 2015. We've taken up what we've said,
18 the first 100 days was doing a coordinated assessment
19 to figure out what our veterans need and determine
20 what housing needs. We have partners that have
21 signed up in terms of providing housing for them,
22 even though their--they housing they're provided are
23 funded through other programs, through New York, New
24 York Three, which we have the Bridge and the Lantern
25 who have designated these units specifically for

2 veterans, and we also have private partners that have
3 offered housing for our folks. We continue our
4 mission and we meet every week to discuss what the
5 needs are and how we can achieve this goal by 2015.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And with respect to
7 the Daily News article that I referenced earlier
8 today, I'm not sure if you're familiar with it, if
9 you've had a chance to see it, but the images in the
10 pictures, at least the ones online, are deeply
11 troubling, and I notice here that it says "A
12 spokesman for the City Department of Homeless
13 Services, which owns the building, said the agency is
14 working with the provider, which is Volunteers of
15 America, to ensure that all of its residents are
16 living in a safe and comfortable environment." What
17 is the process for finding a new provider? If it's
18 obvious from the number of complaints that are made
19 from photographs that veterans are sending to the
20 city saying, "Please, we're living with bed bugs,
21 with rats, with roaches, with vermin. We can't live
22 like this." What is the process that the city
23 engages in to find a better provider for someone to
24 go into those building, which the city owns, to clean
25 them up, to get exterminators in there, to get them

2 up to code? Because I don't think anyone in this
3 room wants a veteran or any New Yorker to live in
4 those conditions, in those living conditions. So
5 what is the process? Can you detail that for me?

6 CAMILLE RIVERA: So, we did address some
7 of the issues in our testimony. We're going to go
8 through them again, but you know, obviously we have
9 real concerns about--obviously we have real concerns
10 about our veterans in the SRO that they feel that
11 they're in an unsafe and unhealthy environment. So
12 we're working very closely with the provider first
13 and foremost to just fix the situation, right? We
14 have to absolutely fix it to make sure they're safe
15 and to make sure that these issues are addressed
16 quickly. So that's what we're doing right now, and so
17 our comment was to basically say we're working on it.
18 We've already met with--I believe two weeks ago we
19 had a meeting at the SRO in Harlem with the Deputy
20 Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioners with the
21 veterans themselves to talk about the issues, to go
22 through what could be fixed and what could be
23 repaired quickly, as well as to create an assessment.
24 And I'm going to let Iris talk through what the
25 actual plan is to address those two issues and how

2 we're going to work closely with the provider to
3 assist in that.

4 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: I agree with you. No
5 one should be living in this condition, and we take
6 pride in how we feel everyone should live, in
7 particular our veterans. New York Department of
8 Homeless Services has taken an approach where we're
9 going to be conducting site visits to these locations
10 and putting a correct action plan. Maintenance is
11 the responsibility of the social service provider.
12 Capital improvement is the responsibility of the
13 city, and these buildings are old, have very terrible
14 infrastructure, and we have put in place, convened a
15 team which is going out there to determine what the
16 needs are to put in request for capital improvements
17 in these locations. So, we usually have two
18 unannounced, two visits, which one is unannounced and
19 one is announced. We're moving into doing quarterly,
20 and like Camille just mentioned, the minute we heard
21 about these complaints my Deputy Commissioner went
22 out there, had a meeting with the clients,
23 specifically our veterans, and has now started a
24 tracking mechanism where they could call us directly.
25 Just want to bring to your attention that this is

2 permanent housing where these tenants have rights.
3 Many times they don't let us into their development,
4 into their units, and they have every right to do so,
5 but we are working with them. We're working VOA
6 particular and we'll take corrective action plan if
7 things don't improve.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, Mayor de Blasio
9 talks about the tale of two cities often in his
10 speeches and whatnot. The CEO of Volunteers for
11 America according to the Daily News makes 401,000
12 dollars a year, and this question is not directed at
13 you, but it should be directed at him, how a man like
14 that can sleep at night making almost a half a
15 million dollars a year when he had dozens of veterans
16 living in his housing complex that the city owns with
17 rats, roaches, mice, bed bugs and every other type of
18 infestation that no New Yorker should ever have to
19 live with, and you know, I just want to impress upon
20 the Administration, Department of Homeless Services,
21 how important it is to review those contracts and to
22 provide at the very least an option for us to
23 terminate our association with providers who are not
24 living up to the expectation of the city or anyone
25 else would want them to set. So if they cannot

2 provide safe, clean housing, permanent housing for
3 veterans, then get them the heck out of there and get
4 someone in who can. And I don't want to read these
5 stories in the Daily News. You don't want to read
6 these stories in the Daily News, but it's sickening.
7 You know, again, for this committee to have an
8 oversight hearing today on this very topic and for
9 something like this to come to light, it just doesn't
10 make things any easier, and I think it says something
11 to us that we can always do better. We need to do
12 better. We must do better, because whatever we're
13 doing now simply isn't enough.

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: And we will continue to
15 work with them, and I agree so heartedly that if they
16 can't perform, we need to hold them accountable to
17 these actions.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, we're going to
19 follow up on that.

20 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Director Richard Multa
21 [sp?] is not the CEO for VOA. He, over six months
22 ago, resigned, so I'm not sure who the new one is,
23 but it's not him.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. So we have
25 some members of the committee who have some questions

2 for the Administration, and I know that a number of
3 folks have signed up to speak, so we want to get to
4 them as well. So, why don't we start with the first
5 panel, Council Member Paul Vallone from Queens? And
6 we'll have the clock set at five minutes if we can.
7 Thank you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I know the
10 Administration is pressed.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you again
12 to our Co-Chairs and thank you General for standing
13 with us with our liberty warriors at the 77th at Fort
14 Totten. I know they expressed deep gratitude. I
15 think the passion that you just expressed is what
16 gives us the hope, because we all stand with Chairman
17 Ulrich on our commitment to make change. As you have
18 said publicly and to us. So, and I know you're within
19 that 90 days, and think that's a tall burden that
20 you've taken on. We're proud you're doing that, but
21 these are all the things we're hoping to have some
22 answers to, and I think first of it has to be
23 financial commitment by the Administration to make
24 that change, otherwise all of this really doesn't
25 matter. Unless we put our financial ability to

2 assist our veterans and their families, it's not
3 going to happen. Now, as far as I know, I think
4 there are three veteran-specific shelters, the two
5 you mentioned and one on Borden Avenue. Is there any
6 plans going forward to increasing that, because I
7 think that would be a huge step. I mean, that means
8 each borough does not have one.

9 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: We have one in Brooklyn.
10 We have one in Queens. Borden is in Queens and
11 Porter Avenue is in Brooklyn.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Do you feel
13 that's sufficient?

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Well, the goal is to try
15 to reduce our numbers and not to open more shelters,
16 but more determined in moving them into permanent
17 housing. So if the goal is to end homeless, then why
18 are we concerning with opening shelter? I think we
19 should focus on moving them into permanent housing.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I mean,
21 there may be some that may argue that this city of
22 eight million has five boroughs and there should be
23 an ability for the city to provide something in each
24 borough, whether it's temporary or permanent, not
25 having to move around from borough to borough, and

2 that the beds that are there may not be sufficient or
3 improper conditions. So, I mean, there always should
4 be room for the possibility of a better facility some
5 place else within the city. That would be the
6 answer, and I hope there's always for providing more.
7 And what about the families of veterans, not just the
8 veterans? Is there a different numbers or policy
9 that we could address? Because when a veteran
10 suffers, the family suffers. So the homelessness of
11 the veteran is obviously transferrable to the
12 families. So, is there anything the Administration's
13 doing addressing the veteran's families?

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: We have families
15 currently in shelter, veteran families. Like I said,
16 we have less than 100 families with children in
17 shelter. We do have--we've been working with HRA to
18 barriers of noncustodial parents, and maybe if they
19 need to be reassessed and things like that. I know
20 that when we work with the individuals, because
21 that's where most of our veterans are in our single
22 system, where we have close to 500 or 600 of them,
23 when we are looking at housing for them, we do take
24 in consideration their families and if they are going
25 to be reunited when we make applications for them

2 HUD-VASH. It's always taken in consideration if
3 there is others whether it be spouse or children in
4 order to give them the proper voucher in order for
5 them to move into permanent housing. So those things
6 are taken into consideration at that time.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And my last point
8 is I think you had mentioned that when you make the
9 original assessment that that gets passed over to the
10 federal level for the ultimate determination. Are
11 you happy with that? Is there anything else the city
12 can do to then take steps on their own through the
13 Administration? I don't--

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] I think
15 we have built such a strong partnership with our VA
16 partners that because we are all collocated in the
17 same building, we have conferences on every single
18 day, and if there's any concerns, because the
19 veterans are residing with us, we tend to know more
20 of their needs. So, that's why we created this
21 multicenter where they could all come, and we do the
22 first assessment because we also have to determine
23 how many days they've been in shelter before we can
24 move them over. It's not to say that they can't go
25 to them directly, but because we've been trying to

2 build a collaborative effort with the VA and DHS and
3 we are collocated in the same location, we prefer
4 them to come to us first that way we could keep
5 record and we could follow up on their behalf with
6 the VA Administration and the services that they
7 need.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So are you
9 suggesting that there's nothing else that needs to be
10 done with the VA and that relationship? You're happy
11 with it is? Because as we make our determinations
12 going forward, we're going to need that cooperation
13 on the state and the federal level also.

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Well, the state is also
15 on site with us, but through the continuum of care,
16 we meet every month in how to reduce some of these
17 bureaucratic and bottlenecks and that's some of the
18 things that we've been already putting in place for
19 the past years, and I think we have a very good
20 system in place. There's always room for improvement
21 and we as an organization, we've passed this and
22 we've had very much success in getting things done
23 and in reducing the bottlenecks that we see at all
24 time. You know, from having a veteran that we feel
25 should be getting one of these vouchers, irrespective

2 of whether they have one year in shelter or they have
3 the definition of HUD. We work with these cases based
4 on needs and up to this day, I think we've had a good
5 partnership and we haven't had any issues with the VA
6 at this point.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I think
8 just in closing, I'm hoping that this period of doing
9 more is what we take from this and that we don't rest
10 on any past special federal successes. I want to see
11 successes on the city level.

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: And I think we are
13 striving for that as well. Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. We'll go
16 to Council Member Vallone, I'm sorry, Council Member
17 Cohen. We went to Vallone already. Cohen of the
18 Bronx, thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Mr.
20 Chairman. Thank you Commissioner Rodriguez. I had
21 some questions regarding, just so I understand the
22 number a little better. You said that today you
23 believe there are approximately 1,300 homeless
24 veterans in New York City. Is that only people who
25 have contact with your agency? Is there some

2 significant number that might be homeless that are
3 not using the shelter system? Is that number a
4 significant number? Do we have any idea what that
5 number might be?

6 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, the 1,300 is the
7 folks that are within us, a part of the street
8 outreach, because we have a team, and also the ones
9 that are the 500 grant per-diem beds that are
10 monitored and supervised by the VA. Pretty sure there
11 may be some definition about double up and couch. We
12 don't have those numbers. So the 1,300 is the folks
13 that we are pretty much aware that's current.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: But you think that
15 number pretty much reflects and accurate description
16 of how many homeless veterans are in New York City
17 today?

18 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: The 1,300 is, like I
19 said, a combi--the way it's broken down is the ones
20 that are DHS, Department of Homeless, within DHS,
21 Department of Homeless Service, the ones that are in
22 the street, which we also keep count and the ones
23 that are part of the VA, yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And the numbers, I
25 guess seem to be trending down. Certainly, I guess

2 there could be some debate as to the rate at which
3 they're turning down, but they seem to be turning
4 down significantly. So, at the moment, you don't--to
5 follow up on something that Council Member Vallone,
6 you don't see the need for additional temporary
7 shelter?

8 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: There's always a need.
9 I don't want to say there's not a need. I think, if
10 I had to say a need for additional veterans shelter,
11 I would rather it be more towards funding for them to
12 go into permanent housing and not open another
13 shelter.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: To that end, I feel
15 compelled to ask, the last Administration announced
16 a shelter in my district for veterans at the Muller
17 Center. I don't know if you know what the status is
18 of that today.

19 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: That's in--the Muller
20 Center is still--the Muller Center's with the Doe
21 fund, if I'm not mistaken, and it's in the Bronx.
22 There is discussion now since our numbers are going
23 down, whether we are going to be opening it as a
24 veteran shelter and if there's a need, but yes, that

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2 was submitted to us as a proposal for veteran shelter
3 out in the Bronx.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I mean, I think
5 that we'd all like to see that money may be invested
6 in permanent housing for veterans as opposed to--

7 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] And
8 that's how it'll go, too. I think that's something
9 that we're having discussion. The Administration is
10 having a discussion how maybe make it into permanent
11 housing versus a shelter.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I'd like to
13 continue--

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] With HPD.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I'd like to be
16 kept abreast of the Administration on their plans for
17 that center. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Let's move onto
19 Council Member Menchaca, Brooklyn.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you, and
21 thank you to the Chairs. I want to thank you for
22 being here and really providing some incredible, I
23 think, passion for the work that we are all trying to
24 do together. But the resolve is pretty clear here
25 for this City Council, and in this new City Council

2 with the leadership, we're going to demand
3 excellence, and that's what we're--and Council Member
4 Cohen kind of said that. That's where we're going to
5 get our hope from, and in the eve of our Veterans Day
6 coming and I just spoke to my brother who's a veteran
7 two term Iraq and Afghanistan yesterday about this
8 moment today, and one of the things we were talking
9 about, and this was the question I have for both
10 homeless services and the veterans departments, both
11 looking at those what I think we can call the
12 invisible, kind of the invisible characteristics and
13 one of them is the LGBT community. And I'm wondering
14 if the reports mention that at all, and be looking to
15 see where we can beef that up, and if we have to
16 spell it out, that we should. So, I wanted to see if
17 you had any kind of preliminary response to the LGBT
18 community within our veterans and what we're doing to
19 address that, both on homelessness and on hunger.

20 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, at Department of
21 Homeless Service, we don't have specific LGBT
22 shelters. We have veteran shelters, and within we
23 have folks that qualify themselves as LGBT. We don't
24 actually track those numbers, that's a question we
25 don't ask. For us, a veteran's a veteran and we

2 provide services irrespective of your preference or
3 not. So, numbers, specific numbers, we wouldn't have
4 or we do not have at Department of Homeless Service.

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Councilman Menchaca,
6 I applaud you for bringing up this issue. I think
7 that it's an area where I know we can do more. We
8 can reach out and engage with the LGBT community. We
9 can find out what their particular and perhaps in
10 some ways specific and unique concerns may be that
11 might not be obvious to others. I know that in my
12 work, for example, as recently as this morning I had
13 the chance to go over to New York Law School and to
14 meet with the Legal Services of New York City who had
15 just so many of the organizations that have already
16 been mentioned today, Project Jericho, SUS, Help USA,
17 so many others, the Urban Justice Center, I mean, so
18 many people who are dedicated to digging in, not just
19 on the social services and the housing piece of it
20 and the health as important as those areas are, but
21 on the legal services end of it also. So, you have
22 my deep heartfelt commitment that we will continue to
23 dig into this particular area and ensure that all of
24 the needs and concerns of the LGBT community are
25 brought forward and that we act upon them working

2 together. I agree there's no daylight between my
3 conviction, our conviction, the Mayor's conviction
4 and the City Council. Thank you so much.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Well, thank you,
6 and I'd like to follow up and really maybe even work
7 with the entire LGBT Caucus to work with the
8 committee and just try to integrate that and really
9 kind of continue to shine light to many identities
10 that our veterans have and how we can make that part
11 of the whole package of services.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I would welcome
13 that, and to your point of the, you know, the many
14 facets to this community. I was in Washington D.C.
15 recently and met with an individual who has been in
16 contact with members of the transgendered community
17 still on active duty, those who are now veterans
18 around the world, and again, giving voice to those
19 who have not had a voice up to this point, and I
20 would definitely look forward to working with you on
21 this. Thank you so much Councilman Menchaca.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you,
23 Commissioner.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member
25 Fernando Cabrera.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
3 much to the Chairs for having this hearing.

4 Commissioners, welcome, so glad to have you here.

5 Let me start by focusing on that number, which seems
6 pretty amazing. We only have 100 that we've been
7 able to identify that are chronically homeless in the
8 street, is that correct?

9 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Veterans.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Veterans.

11 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: We had 120 last year.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I'm sorry, I
13 can't hear you.

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: As of today it's 100
15 chronic homeless. I think one of the biggest impact
16 we've had with the street folks with Robin Hood and
17 our outreach and our Assistant Commissioner that
18 focus specifically on working directly with it. And
19 last year, what we did is put in place a program
20 where we were directly working with them, giving them
21 HUD-VASH, New York, New York Three, and the agency
22 made at that time an effort to prioritize them into
23 New York, New York supportive housing.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Do you--have you
25 spoken to the advocates regarding this number? Are

2 the advocates in agreement with your assessment
3 that's there's only about 100 or just, you know,
4 around that number? Have they ever spoken to you
5 about this?

6 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: The Assistant
7 Commissioner for street reach is very much in touch
8 with the advocacy and she works very closely with
9 them. I'm pretty sure there's constant discussion,
10 but you know,--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing] Do
12 you know if they're in agreement with that number?

13 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Absolutely, that's the
14 number our agency has and we work with those numbers
15 every day.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: No, but I'm
17 saying are the advocates in agreement with that
18 number? That's the question.

19 CAMILLE RIVERA: [off mic]

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: If you could
21 speak to the mic, please.

22 CAMILLE RIVERA: Sorry.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I know you can't
24 speak for the advocates, but--

2 CAMILLE RIVERA: [interposing] We can't
3 speak on behalf of the advocates. We know that we're
4 in constant communication with them around there.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But that's what
6 I'm asking.

7 CAMILLE RIVERA: And our--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]
9 The question I'm asking--let me--maybe I'm not being
10 clear. The question I'm asking is have the advocates
11 talked to you about the number that you're putting
12 forth? Because obviously we're being doubting
13 Thomas's here about only being 100. And I'll tell
14 you from my end, and it's anecdotal, you know, I just
15 see so many people with their signs saying, "I'm a
16 veteran." I see it on the subways, and it's quite a
17 bit of people that I see outside. So either they're
18 not homeless or either they're not homeless or
19 they're not veterans, or they are and we're not
20 counting them, or you know, there's a gap of
21 perception here, and that's why I'm asking about the
22 advocates, because I know they are on the ground and
23 I respect what they have to say as well.

24 CAMILLE RIVERA: So I would say we are on
25 the ground as well. Our street outreach team, we've

2 doubled our efforts in terms of resources on the
3 ground, not only on the subways, but on the street,
4 and you know, our numbers are pretty good, the
5 relationships that we have. I mean, we can-- we can't
6 answer again on behalf of what the advocates would
7 say. I don't know if they're in absolute 100 percent
8 agreement with us on 100 versus--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]
10 Okay, so you answered the question.

11 CAMILLE RIVERA: one hundred and 20, but
12 we can figure that out. I would say that, you know,
13 we're really proud of our efforts, as much as we can.
14 Obviously, there's more to do, but our directors of
15 outreach and the people who are out there have very
16 strong relationships with the people on the ground,
17 and I think that we can definitely do more.

18 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Let me be clear, if
19 this is the reality, I commend you. I'll say that
20 right from the start, because this is an amazing
21 number, but I'm asking because you get to go first in
22 the hearings, and then everybody leaves from the
23 Administration. They come, and then often what I
24 hear is a different reality. Again, I wait until the
25 next hearing, "By the way, three months ago what we

2 were told was this." So, I wanted to know one, is
3 this that discussion. If it's not, you know, it's
4 not the end of the world. However, the discussion
5 should be taking place, and they should, you know,
6 they should be some kind of discussions regarding
7 whether these numbers compare with each other. And
8 let me move onto the last because I only have one
9 minute. My last question is how long did your agency
10 know about the conditions of the buildings that the
11 Chairman spoke about that were pointed out in the
12 Daily News?

13 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, these conditions
14 were brought to our attention specifically 119th
15 Street a few weeks ago. Like I mentioned previously,
16 as soon as we were made aware of it, our Deputy
17 Commissioner went out there, had a meeting with the
18 residents. This is permanent residency. It's not a
19 shelter and we did conduct surveys, and we're
20 addressing it immediately.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So, prior to
22 that, because you can't expect what you don't expect
23 [sic]. That will always be my philosophy. So prior
24 to that, how has your department--maybe I should ask
25 in a different way. Does your department go only

2 when there is a complaint, or do you go, or is this a
3 new policy you just mentioned that now you're going
4 to go every three months prior to this? And let me
5 ask you in a different, because I know I won't get to
6 ask another question, is why didn't we know before?
7 And obviously it was the tenants who complained. So,
8 why we didn't know before? And I would imagine at
9 least one person would have complained, and I'm
10 pretty sure if we look at the 311 records, I'm sure
11 somebody did complain.

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Though, I think a lot of
13 the tenants complaint go directly to the provider,
14 and one of the corrective action plan we've put in
15 place is that also going to be coming out to the
16 agency.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Very good.

18 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So we can address it.
19 And we do go out there, but when the city's going out
20 there, because we're responsible of the capital
21 improvement, we're looking more of the
22 infrastructures that need to be done, whether it be
23 the sewerage, whether it be the roof or it be boiler,
24 but now we're also taking a conscious effort also to

2 look at the maintenance where VOA is supposed to be
3 responsible. So we're also monitoring those now.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Well, thank you
5 for adapting. I commend you for changing that policy.
6 I think that we need the check and balances. Thank
7 you so much. I'm sorry I didn't get to ask you a
8 question, but I've run out of time. Oh, okay, great,
9 great. Well, we're being so gracious today. Maybe
10 that's because I was last. I did have--oh, regarding
11 best practices, I had an opportunity to watch on TV,
12 I forgot if it was ABC, the program in Phoenix,
13 Arizona, I was impressed. I mean, the place is a
14 five star looking place. It's a place that anybody
15 would want to be. The level of sensitivity, the
16 services, the mental health services, the field where
17 I come from, I mean, it's clear. It was very
18 intentional. It was first class. Is there something
19 that we're looking to replicate here in the city, and
20 if we are, by when?

21 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, I think we always
22 looking to improve. We would--I have to honestly
23 look at it a little bit more in detailed. I don't
24 know exactly the entire model. I've made notes for me
25 to go out there and look at it, and if it's something

2 that's working for them and we can replicate, I'm 100
3 percent in favor of it. I think we always have room
4 for improvement, and as an agency and organization,
5 that's what we want to do. We want to be able to
6 provide the best service for our veterans and to our
7 homeless as a whole. So, we will take a look at
8 that.

9 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Well, I appreciate
10 that answer. And is there any other best practice
11 programs that you see around the nation that you have
12 been able to fly over there or to visit. Do they let
13 you out?

14 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: You mentioned that New
15 York City was recognized for our best practice model.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes.

17 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So they're modeling ours
18 where we have a multiservice center where all city,
19 state and federal government are all collocated in
20 one place to provide seamless continuation of
21 services to our veterans. So, you're mentioning
22 that, and they're actually looking at our best
23 practice model to replicate it. So, I would yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: So, will you say
25 that we have the best program in the nation?

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Have one of the best
3 programs.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

5 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: So, that's why I
7 say it's good to look at the other ones too.

8 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Absolutely.

9 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: You know, you could
10 always learn, you know, what component of the program
11 that they're working in that they have shown to be
12 the best.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Councilman Cabrera,
14 as Chairman Ulrich has said, there's always more that
15 we can do. We can always learn from others who are
16 doing things perhaps that we haven't thought of yet,
17 and yes, they are coming to learn from us. I want to
18 just comment quickly on your question about the
19 numbers and the advocates. You know, much of what
20 I've learned thus far during my tenure has come from
21 the hard won wisdom of advocates. And as I've talked
22 to them about this issue, you know, I've heard
23 probably some of the same comments that you have, and
24 so what we've agreed to do is listen, you know, I
25 can't answer that, and I don't know what the reality

2 is on the street, but I'll tell you what, in January
3 I'm inviting any advocate who wants to come with me
4 and show me where you know homeless veterans are. We
5 want to know where they are.

6 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: If there are more
8 than what we know there are right now, there's no one
9 who wants to know that more than we do. So thank
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: That's fantastic.
12 I'll be joining you in that tour. Chairmen, thank you
13 so much for the extra time.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you
15 Council Member Cabrera. I just have a couple of more
16 questions. I know that we had set a time, a hard stop
17 at 3:00 p.m., so if you'll indulge me for a few more
18 moments here. So, going back to the issue of the 100
19 street homeless, that was a number that came from the
20 January 2014 Hope Count, is that right, or is that a
21 number that is arrived at through another means?

22 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: The street count.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If you could speak in
24 the mic, sorry.

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: I'm sorry. The street
3 counts everyone that's in the street, irrespective of
4 whether they're veterans or not.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, no, I know that.
6 I'm saying the--

7 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] The 100--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] The
9 100 people come--that was a count done on the night
10 of the Hope Count, or that's a count from another,
11 some other count?

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Count as of today's
13 date. The count on 2013 on Hope was much higher.
14 We've been working with our street folks. We've been
15 working with our partners with the Robin Hood
16 Foundation. We've been doing best practice models
17 specifically around our veterans, chronic veterans in
18 the street, and that number is what I'm quoting that
19 has been reduced from 120 that we had last year where
20 we took this initiative to 100--

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] These
22 are 120 individuals that are known to a common ground
23 or BRC--

24 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] That's
25 correct.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Or some--so that's
3 not the Hope Count number of veterans.

4 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: It's the full count of
5 the chronic street homeless veterans.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Those individuals
7 that are known to the city, not just on the night of
8 the Hope Count which is in the middle of January at
9 midnight.

10 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: That's correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I am--

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] Change--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm skeptical. I got
14 to tell you. I'm skeptical that there are, the city
15 is saying that there are 100 street homeless veterans
16 in the city of New York out of a population of over
17 eight million people that there are 100. I mean,
18 everybody, I mean, honestly, every New Yorker knows--
19 I mean, every New Yorker sees when we go into the
20 subways, when we're walking down the street, when
21 we're out on Broadway in front of our office or on
22 Park Place a veteran who is out there on hard times
23 who's asking for help. So, I'm skeptical. I'm
24 skeptical. I got to say.

2 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Well, this year we took
3 over the MTA, and we partnered with them. So we are
4 now in all the train stations, something that street
5 outreach was not in the past. So, now that we are
6 now have access to the trains and we are monitoring
7 those contracts through BRC who was the one that was
8 allotted that, we will be having, you know, a more
9 precise number and now going into all of them. Our
10 numbers were specifically for the folks in the
11 street. It didn't include the MTA numbers, because
12 we just took over those contracts I think now in this
13 past July.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I want to go
15 back. I know I focused on this before, but I went
16 back. So I brought up the numbers from the HUD point
17 in time survey in 2012.

18 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 2012, New York City
20 had 3,790 homeless veterans, point in time 2012.
21 2013, that number dropped by about 250 to 3,547. So,
22 in 12 months, about a 250 headcount drop. And then,
23 in the next 12 months is when it dropped to 1,645.
24 So, in one year there was a drop of 250. In the next
25 year, there was a drop of almost 2,000. What did the

2 city of New York with its partners do differently
3 between January 2013 and January 2014 than what they
4 did between January of 2012 and January 2013?

5 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: So, again, I think us
6 building on our past experience and working together
7 with our federal and state and city and not for
8 profit organizations and working on how we can place
9 these individuals into permanent housing.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Which we weren't
11 doing in 2012?

12 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: We were doing. We were
13 restarted. I think because the success in our way of
14 how we did, we just get better at what we're doing.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, but you can
16 understand why this committee, I as the Chair of this
17 committee would have some skepticism over that number
18 without knowing where those individuals went. You
19 know, it is--it's one thing to say that we're doing a
20 better job one year to the next, you know, we're
21 doing a better job than we did last year. We got
22 some best practices. We saw what they did somewhere
23 else and adopted some of those practices, but it's
24 another thing to say--I mean, this is a tough nut to
25 crack. This is not an easy thing to do. If it was

2 an easy thing to do, we wouldn't have 57,000 homeless
3 people in New York City. If it was easy to do, we
4 would have success like that across the system.

5 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Well, I think a lot of
6 the success which we don't have for our 57,000 folks
7 that are in current shelters that we have the support
8 of the federal government. We have renter resources
9 for them that we don't have for our 57,000 folks in
10 shelter.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's why I would
12 like to know what type of resources each of those
13 individuals are receiving. I don't understand. It
14 really confounds me how we could go from 250 one year
15 to 2,000 the next year. That doesn't make any sense.
16 It just doesn't. And reading the five high impact
17 steps from the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran
18 Homelessness, and I'm reading, this is from the
19 National Alliance to End Homelessness. In the
20 section about creating accountability, it says,
21 "Solid shared data and performance benchmark measures
22 progress toward the goal and hold participants
23 accountable. At present, different partners may use
24 different data and benchmarks. And the recommendation
25 is to establish the data systems to be used and the

2 entities that will be responsible for collecting and
3 reporting data. How many homeless veterans are being
4 housed? How long is it taking? How many veterans
5 remain homeless? Create a system of regular
6 reporting on progress. Identification of problems,
7 the use of collective knowledge to address issues or
8 make course correction promptly to whom these reports
9 are being made, etcetera." Data collection and
10 performance measure is an important part of this
11 national initiative, and I just don't feel--I mean,
12 it's great that we're all congratulating ourselves
13 and we're saying, you know, we're getting national
14 awards, and that's great, but there has to be data
15 behind that, because I just--I still don't get it. I
16 don't understand how we could go from 250 one year to
17 2,000 the next. If there's data behind that, then
18 that's great, but we need to see it.

19 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Sure.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, I want to
21 thank the Administration. I appreciate your
22 testimony. You stayed for well beyond what we even
23 asked you to. So I know you were here for over two
24 hours, and we do appreciate it. I know there's some
25 follow up questions that the Administration will have

2 the opportunity to provide to the council to the
3 respective committees. And again, I just want to
4 thank you for coming. That was a very important
5 topic and I know you feel as strongly as we do. So,
6 I want to thank the Administration and we'll move
7 onto the next panel.

8 IRIS RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. The
10 first panel will consist of Triada Stampas from the
11 Food Bank for New York City, John Rowan from VVA,
12 Vietnam Veterans of America, Kamilla Sjödin-- I'm
13 sorry, thank you, from NYLAG. I should know that.
14 And Kevin Kenneally also from NYLAG. Is that right?
15 Is that correct? Yeah, there are four testifying,
16 two from NYLAG, and each speaker will have four
17 minutes. That's what the Chairs agreed on. For
18 testimony, and then there'll be questions after
19 everyone is done testifying from the Council Members
20 who wish to ask them.

21 TRIADA STAMPAS: Good afternoon and thank
22 you Chairs Ulrich and Levin and the members of the
23 General Welfare and Veterans Committee. My name is
24 Triada Stampas. I'm Vice President for Research and
25 Public Affairs at Food Bank for New York City, and I

2 thank you for the opportunity to testify about this
3 important topic today of ending veteran homelessness
4 and hunger in our city. Clearly, we see that veterans
5 are not adequately sheltered from the broader
6 economic conditions that drive food insecurity, but
7 we can be doing a lot to serve them better, and I
8 think that that's probably an emerging theme from
9 this hearing that we can do better and we can do
10 more. So, I'm going to focus my testimony on two
11 things, what we know about veterans experiencing food
12 needs in our city and what the best practices are in
13 the field to address those needs. So here's what we
14 know, and I start with a caution, our most recent
15 data is from 2012, and that misses two important
16 things, the effects of Hurricane Sandy and the
17 effects of cuts to food stamps, SNAP benefits that
18 took place in November 2013. So what I'm about to
19 tell you is what we knew prior to those two big
20 events that happened and that what is likely today
21 maybe considerably worse because we know that those
22 two events did drive a lot of demand at food pantries
23 and soup kitchens. So, again, in 2012, just about
24 70,000 veterans were turning to food pantries and
25 soup kitchens. Seventy-thousand veterans is about 30

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2 percent of the entire veteran population of New York
3 City going to a food pantry or a soup kitchen across
4 the five boroughs. Twenty-nine percent of veteran
5 households reported experiencing difficulty affording
6 food. This was an uptick from the previous year,
7 despite the fact that overall trends in New York City
8 were going down. So, veteran households were
9 reporting an increase just as the rest of the city
10 was appearing to find some relief. This also showed
11 up in terms of the food sacrifices that veterans were
12 reporting, whether it was reducing the size of meals
13 or skipping meals. Those numbers showed an increase
14 over one year between 2011 and 2012 while for most of
15 the rest of the city, those numbers trended downward.
16 So that's what we know. What we can do serve
17 veterans better really comes down to cultural
18 competency and partnerships. What we and other anti-
19 hunger organizations across the country have found is
20 how very important it is to speak the same language
21 as the people we serve, and in the case of veterans
22 and especially among younger veterans returning from
23 deployment from Iraq and Afghanistan, the cultural
24 divide, the civilian military cultural divide is a
25 real things and leads to social isolation and

2 disengagement, and so those 70,000 veterans who are
3 showing up on food pantry and soup kitchen lines
4 often do not identify themselves as such. There is a
5 trust building process that takes time, and we have a
6 network of close to 1,000 food pantries and soup
7 kitchens seeing 70,000 veterans come through their
8 doors without necessarily having that cultural
9 competency to speak that same language, and therefore
10 better connect veterans to the other services that
11 they can get beyond the food that they need in that
12 moment. So many of our food pantries and soup
13 kitchens help people enroll in SNAP. So, with due
14 respect to the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs,
15 you know, three benefit enrollment specialists was an
16 asset for sure to that team, but we have a network of
17 people across the city that help people to do that at
18 a thousand different locations and they can be better
19 trained to better serve this population as well. So,
20 it comes--and so partnerships, I think is the only
21 other thing that I want to say. Partnerships with
22 veterans organizations will help est--can help
23 establish that cultural competency, can help
24 establish reaching veterans where they are so that
25 discouragement doesn't keep them from seeking

2 services, and with that I think I'll conclude. And
3 thank you so much again for the opportunity to
4 testify. I look forward to your questions.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: John?

6 JOHN ROWAN: Hi, Chairman Levin, Chairman
7 Ulrich and the members of the City Council it's nice
8 to be here. Unfortunately this is an issue that's
9 been talked about in this room for many years. The
10 issue of homeless veterans first was identified in
11 1981 by then Comptroller Golden here in the city of
12 New York when he did the study of homelessness in the
13 city shelter system at that time. As a result of
14 those findings, the City Council in part of the
15 Committees on Homelessness Chaired by then Council
16 Member Gurguess [sp?], now Judge Gurguess from
17 Brooklyn, started to really dig into the issue, and
18 he was a very good supporter of veterans and created
19 a committee of all the veteran service organizations
20 which looked into this problem, which resulted quite
21 frankly in the establishment of the Borden Avenue
22 Veterans Residence in 1985. It'll celebrate its 30th
23 anniversary next year. So for 30 years this city has
24 been dealing with homeless veterans in one fashion or
25 another. We had other projects in those days over in

2 Ward's Island and several other locations in the
3 city, which have seen--some have faded away. Some
4 have stayed. It also led to the creation of East
5 119th Street and Commonwealth as more permanent
6 facilities for the housing of veterans. We used to
7 have a--the city used to have a homeless program
8 upstate New York where they shipped people upstate,
9 and they killed that program many, many years ago.
10 And there were a lot of veterans in that program, I
11 know, and it almost became a senior citizen
12 residence. One thing we always knew right from the
13 beginning was that homeless veterans are not just
14 homeless. It's not just the loss of a house or less
15 of a house. It's often related to mental health
16 issues, PTSD, substance abuse, which is often related
17 to PTSD etcetera. So we've always made sure that any
18 program we do gets that into place, and that must
19 continue as we go forward. And what makes it so much
20 more difficult when we deal with these chronically
21 homeless folks, that often they are also with the
22 severe mentally ill folks, for lots of different
23 reasons, and especially those who are older and have
24 been out there a long time. One of the things that
25 we would be curious to see is when you look into the

2 counts on the issue of women and family shelters, how
3 many women veterans are in there with their families.

4 We know from experiences, and my Vice President was
5 the former director of a program in Philadelphia

6 which had a 30 bed facility for women which all had

7 kids, and they had to deal with that. And of course,

8 when we dig into the women veterans, we deal with

9 sexual trauma issues almost predominantly amongst the

10 homeless women veterans. I would also be curious to

11 see how they fall together with the veterans courts

12 in the city. Unfortunately, we still have a couple

13 of boroughs. Staten Island I think is finally coming

14 on board hopefully soon, and for whatever reason or

15 other the DA here in Manhattan won't give us a

16 veterans court, and I don't understand why. One of

17 the things we learned years ago is that veterans are

18 not just a special class that ought to be treated

19 better, but by dealing with them as veterans, it

20 gives them an op--and bringing them together as

21 veterans, it gives an opportunity to help each other.

22 We had a big fight with the HRA Commissioner at the

23 time when we did the 85 Borden Avenue Veterans

24 Residence, he didn't understand why veterans got

25 special treatment. What he didn't understand was the

2 one thing they had no matter what they didn't have,
3 was they had their military service, and they could
4 take pride in that and use that as a basis by which
5 to go forward. And so that's still there today.

6 It's the basis for many of the programs that we have,
7 and we think that again, some more funds need to be
8 done into it, but the real issue is permanent
9 housing. I'd be curious to see how they got 2,000
10 people into a permanent housing system in a year when
11 the HUD-VASH didn't go up--VASH vouchers didn't go up
12 that much. So, it's going to be--I just want to see
13 how those stats come out. And as I say, last but not
14 least, the veterans courts, very crucial part of the
15 whole thing. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Fuzzy math. NYLAG?

17 KEVIN KENNEALLY: Okay, well good
18 afternoon everyone. My name is Kevin Kenneally. I'm
19 a Supervising Attorney at NYLAG, the New York Legal
20 Assistance Group, and I'm joined here by Kamilla
21 Sjödin, who's our Associate Director at NYLAG, and
22 you know, just want to recognize David Falcon, who
23 actually is a staff attorney who actually works all
24 with veterans in our office as well. So, I'm going
25 to talk a little bit about sort of the work that we

2 do and some of the key issues that NYLAG sees can
3 help homeless veterans. So we want to commend all
4 your work that you've done on this very difficult
5 issue. The work that I do is I staff two legal
6 clinics at VA medical centers. One in the Bronx up
7 on Kingsbridge Road, and the second one is in
8 Manhattan on 23rd Street. And you know, we've seen
9 hundreds of veterans come in with various housing
10 issues, many of whom are already in Housing Court,
11 and the vast majority of them actually do HUD-VASH
12 vouchers, but yet they end up in court for various
13 different reasons. These are particularly vulnerable
14 veterans. We're located in the outpatient mental
15 health department, so all the veterans we have are
16 very mentally impaired. Many have physical
17 impairments, and when they are basically thrown into
18 the Housing Court system, they're just unfortunately
19 unable to advocate for themselves. And of course,
20 just to talk a little bit about the hunger issue, you
21 know, permanent housing of course it's filed to
22 ending hunger. Someone becomes homeless, basically
23 they're unstable at that point. So, the permanent
24 housing in our view, allows for, you know, to store
25 food, obviously, to buy in bulk, to cook your own

2 meals, and of course, you know, to be able to prepare
3 healthy meals if you actually have a kitchen that you
4 can use. Just wanted to briefly give a case example
5 focusing a little bit on the work that, you know, my
6 colleague David Falcon does who works with those
7 veterans who are outside the VA hospitals who also
8 have troubling issues, and many of them are not
9 eligible for the HUD-VASH vouchers because they
10 haven't met the chronically homeless definition under
11 that. So, you know, they--because of ongoing rental
12 assistance is not available to them, they do also
13 face eviction on the basis of falling into arrears,
14 because either they've lost income and can't pay
15 their rent, increasing rents, maybe a roommate has
16 moved out, perhaps medical expenses, more other
17 similar areas. So, we do work closely with SSVF to
18 try to get funding as well as the Human Resources
19 Administration, but still those clients often face
20 barriers. And just to kind of make some concrete
21 recommendations based on, you know, the issues that
22 we see. You know, we, in many of our housing cases
23 we have problems with the New York City Housing
24 Authority who manages the HUD-VASH vouchers, not
25 fixing and changing income. Often when a veteran

2 loses income, whether it's a loss of unemployment
3 benefits or work, New York City Housing Authority
4 does take several months to change the share so that
5 the veteran pay is a lower amount. They go into
6 arears and they end up in Housing Court. So,
7 certainly anything that can be done to help speed
8 that process along would be greatly beneficial. The
9 one shot funding through the Human Resources
10 Administration is key for our clients. I mean, it's--
11 --if we didn't have that funding our clients would
12 become homeless. And just so that the committee
13 knows, if they are evicted, they lose their HUD-VASH
14 vouchers, and then they're repeating the cycle of
15 homelessness. We've also seen some issues especially
16 with my mentally ill clients with them being unable
17 to advocate with agencies. So of course, agencies
18 should continually be trained on ADA compliance and
19 working with the mentally ill, because many of them
20 just can't advocate for themselves. City agencies
21 should always screen for veteran status, because
22 obviously there are many income support programs and
23 housing programs that are only available to vets.
24 And in addition, they're--since HUD-VASH is highly
25 restricted, the council should think of perhaps other

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2 funding sources that could subsidize housing for
3 homeless veterans. Did you have anything to add?

4 Great, thank you all.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you very much
6 each of you for your testimony. Do any of my
7 colleagues have any questions for any members of the
8 panel? Doctor Cabrera?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you.
10 Sorry, I just have--I feel impulsive today. I have
11 to ask this question. You heard me ask question
12 about the 100 chronically homeless, do you think
13 that's an accurate number or not?

14 JOHN ROWAN: Personally, no.

15 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Why?

16 JOHN ROWAN: Because historically,
17 veterans are very under counted. There's a two filed
18 sword here. One is the people who sit around saying
19 they're veterans often aren't. So, that's a problem,
20 because they think veterans get more benefits or
21 something or get more sympathy they put that on their
22 placards. But in fact, there are lots of seriously--
23 as you mentioned earlier, the chronically homeless
24 and mentally ill who are really buried in the
25 systems, and you know, the question is what's

2 homeless? You know, if you're one step of getting
3 evicted as they say earlier, or your family's finally
4 getting tired of you or whatever the situation may
5 be, there's lots more people out there, I think.
6 Unfortunately, we find them all the time.

7 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Actually
9 I have a question for Ms. Stampas with regard to
10 your, the organizations that you work with, the soup
11 kitchens and food pantries, do they receive referrals
12 from MOVA? Is there a relationship there? Is there
13 a, you know, a continuum where an individual will
14 come to MOVA for service and are then getting
15 referred to membership organizations?

16 TRIADA STAMPAS: Well, we heard the
17 Commissioner testify today that MOVA makes referrals.
18 To be perfectly honest, it's unlikely that a veteran
19 showing up at a food pantry or a soup kitchen would
20 report that referral. There is a lot of stigma
21 associated with seeking assistance, and for veterans
22 what we find is being on a food pantry or soup
23 kitchen line is not the place where they advertise
24 their status, and so I would imagine that the source

2 of the referral might not be something they'd be
3 willing to report openly in all cases.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Would you recommend
5 then a system by which community based organizations,
6 neighborhood based organizations are the point of
7 contact for veterans to sign, you know, to sign up
8 for benefits, or you know, make sure that they're
9 enrolled in all the benefits that they are eligible
10 for? Is that something that would make a lot more
11 sense so that there's making sure that they're not,
12 veterans are not just being referred from MOVA over
13 to HRA, which you know, HRA being a large
14 bureaucracy.

15 TRIADA STAMPAS: I don't think it's an
16 either or. I think it's more complimentary, and I
17 don't want to make little of the special training
18 that dedicated benefits, benefits enrollment
19 specialists can have in veteran specific issues with
20 regard to eligibility for benefits and things like
21 that. But there are veterans showing up at food
22 pantries and soup kitchens that most certainly have
23 come there without any referral from MOVA, and so
24 they're showing up on their own, and making that a
25 point of contact, and a bridge to benefit is really

2 important. Having it central, only centralized is
3 not the answer. I mean, there's got to be some
4 complementarity of services.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you think some
6 type of program or working with MOVA and either not
7 for profit providers and soup kitchens and food
8 pantries so that there's some staff training as you
9 said, that that would be something that could be of
10 great benefit?

11 TRIADA STAMPAS: We would absolutely
12 welcome that. There is great benefit in that, and
13 that is a best practice that is in place. You know,
14 most anti-hunger organizations across the country in
15 service providers are civilian organizations, and
16 best practice across the country in this work is
17 really engaging veterans to reach out to other
18 veterans, engaging veterans organizations in outreach
19 and in partnership for program design, for just
20 speaking the right language, and making that
21 environment a little bit more welcoming of veterans
22 as veterans and not making that status completely
23 invisible.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So I see our
3 Commissioner over here nodding as well, so maybe we
4 can work together on establishing those--

5 JOHN ROWAN: Can I answer that too?

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes, sir.

7 JOHN ROWAN: One of the problems we have
8 sometimes is people don't self-identify correctly.
9 So they don't think of themselves as veterans. If
10 they didn't serve in a combat area or a lot of the
11 women run into this all the time, somehow they don't
12 consider themselves veterans. The question is often--
13 --and the other things is we have to ask. One of the
14 biggest battles we had in the early days was getting
15 HRA to add something in their databases, "Did you
16 serve in the military?" Not, "Are you a veteran," by
17 the way, but, "Did you serve in the military?" That's
18 the key question because that's the answers you need
19 to get, and there is a stigma to the issue and that
20 whole business that some people are reticent to give
21 that information up, which is a shame because then we
22 lose the ability to reach out to them to get them the
23 help that they deserve.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.
3 Thank you to this panel for your insightful
4 testimony. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, we're going to
6 move onto the next panel. We have Sharon Sweeting-
7 Lindsey, Vets Incorporated, Matthew Silverstein,
8 America Works of NYC, Craig Caruana, also America
9 Works, and Carla Giglio. Each speaker will have four
10 minutes to speak. Oh, you know, before I asked the
11 panel to speak, I forgot to mention because of the
12 order of business today, Council Member Vallone does
13 wish to speak on the record on the Resolution that
14 the committee is having this hearing on, so I want to
15 give him a few minutes just to discuss his resolution
16 that he is the prime sponsor of, and then we'll move
17 on to the next panel. So Council Member Vallone,
18 please.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair
20 Ulrich. Just as a point of information for everyone,
21 and especially for the advocates and the veterans, we
22 also have in today's oversight hearing a resolution
23 that we are together on. I was proud to sponsor it
24 and everyone joined on. And we see afoot in Albany
25 some legislation that's floating around focusing on

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2 studies for specific issues regarding women veterans
3 who are homeless and the issues that are facing our
4 women that has now grown to encompass today's
5 hearing, not just women, but all homeless. So my
6 resolution, and I thank our Co-Chairs for signing on.
7 Reso 204A calls on the state to pass legislation
8 which would require the New York State Division of
9 Veterans Affairs to conduct a study regarding
10 homeless female veterans in New York. Homelessness
11 and food insecurity among female veterans has been
12 increasingly a serious issue, considering that many
13 female veterans face challenges when returning to
14 civilian life that are different from our male
15 counterparts, including raising children, dealing
16 with psychological burdens and military sexual
17 trauma. The resolution requires a study to gather
18 information to help them regarding these crisis as
19 well as going a long way toward accurately assessing
20 the issue for strategies to outline our female
21 veterans. I'm proud to have introduced this
22 resolution and applaud our Council Members for
23 signing on. I also would like to thank Eric
24 Burnstein [sp?], our counsel to the committee. Just
25 something to also add to the reflection of today's

2 thoughts if you had, hopefully will support us on the
3 resolution. Thank you Mr. Ulrich for our Chair,
4 thank you very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Council
6 Member Vallone. And we will now begin with the
7 panelists. Ms. Lindsey, please?

8 SHARON SWEETING-LINDSEY: Good afternoon
9 everyone. My name is Sharon Sweeting-Lindsey. I
10 served 26 years in the United States Army Reserve as
11 a Food Service Officer and Clinical Dietician. I
12 retired with the rank of Major, and for the last four
13 years I have administered a ten bed residential
14 facility for formerly displaced veterans where we
15 provide three meals per day and a myriad of
16 supportive services. Excuse me. And for the last
17 eight years I have managed five food pantries in
18 southeast Queens that are veteran operated. We do,
19 however, serve the non-veteran community at large.
20 Thus, I feel dually qualified to speak to the duality
21 of homelessness and hunger in the veteran community.
22 Homelessness in the veteran community is a serious
23 quality of life issue, which New York City and the
24 federal government have attempted to address. New
25 York City has funded several agencies through DHS and

2 HRA to house the veteran population. The efforts
3 have been noble at best in that they provide the
4 basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter.

5 However, my issues of concern are that this pre-décor
6 [sic] concepts that are paramount to the reactivation
7 of the military mindset have not been realized. HRA
8 and DHS have awarded all of their housing contracts
9 for veterans to corporate based organizations. In an
10 effort to appear veteran friendly, these
11 organizations have employed former vet in key
12 positions. However, the corporate culture still
13 exists. Studies have shown repeatedly that veterans
14 relate more readily to veterans. The degree of
15 success and measurable outcomes are greatly
16 increased, yet none of the DHS or HIA contracts are
17 awarded to truly veteran-based organizations that
18 will reactivate the core military values of
19 leadership, dignity, respect, selfless service,
20 honesty, integrity and personal courage. Hunger: No
21 citizen of this great city should experience the
22 pangs of hunger, but with food stamps being reduced
23 and housing expenses rising, the issue of food
24 inadequacy are alive and real as demonstrated by the
25 increase in the pantry participation by the community

2 at large and our veteran population. In Vets
3 Incorporated, five food pantries of the 147 men that
4 we service, 64 are veterans. This is indeed a sad
5 commentary to the men who have served our country and
6 now are on a food distribution line. Hunger has
7 replaced their pride and survival skills have been
8 reengaged. Recommendations: Homelessness: all
9 housing contacts to house and feed veterans should be
10 prioritized to veteran operated agencies with the
11 skill sets to reactivate all of the core military
12 values and return the veteran to the don't give up
13 the fight warrior mindset they had prior to their
14 fall from grace. Subcontracts for maintenance and
15 food services should be given to veteran-based
16 agencies. These two suggestions will first and
17 foremost give veterans gainful employment and
18 demonstrate the mantra of veterans helping veterans.
19 Additionally, it will increase the level of program
20 efficacy as veterans respond more readily to
21 veterans. Hunger: Increase funding to organizations
22 such as the Food Bank for the City of New York and
23 EFAC [sic] that provide food distribution packages to
24 community-based agencies and allocate special funding
25 for those CBO's that serve predominantly veteran

2 population, especially veteran based organizations
3 such as Vets Incorporated. If this fact finding
4 committee is truly interested in making an impact on
5 the quality of life for veterans in New York City,
6 the above listed recommendations are the first step
7 on the road to progress. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
9 testimony. America Works?

10 CRAIG CARUANA: Thank you, Chairman
11 Ulrich and Chairman Levin for having this committee
12 on a issue of importance to all of us battling the
13 issue of homelessness amongst New York City veterans,
14 and of course, a happy birthday to the Marine Corps.
15 Make sure to tell all the staff today to say happy
16 birthday when they see a Marine. It might be common
17 to those of us who work with veterans, but to the
18 general populous at large, sometimes these things are
19 lost on society. I know many of us have testified
20 before this committee before. I just would like to
21 introduce a new member of our team, Carla Giglio who
22 joined America Works recently and who works one on
23 one with our homeless sections. And of course, is
24 currently serves in the United States Navy Reserve
25 herself. I'll give a brief overview of America Works

2 today, and then my colleague Mr. Matthew Silverstein
3 will go into some recommendations. Since 1984,
4 America Works have been lifting people out of poverty
5 by providing employment readiness and job placement
6 services. America Works pioneered the idea of pay
7 for performance contracting for social services. In
8 other words, America Works only gets paid if we get
9 someone a job and they keep that job. According to
10 New York City's Office of Data Reporting Analysis,
11 America Works of New York Inc. has consistently
12 ranked first in long term job placement among all the
13 city employment service contractors. Now, around
14 2008 we noticed a surge of unemployed veterans coming
15 to our offices for employment services. According to
16 a report by US Senator Christian Joderbran's [sp?]
17 Office, at the time there were about 12,577
18 unemployed veterans living in New York City. Keep in
19 mind this is in 2008. By 2009, according to New York
20 City DHS there was about 2,277 homeless veterans
21 living in the city's homeless shelters. So we as a
22 company tried to see what we could do for the city's
23 homeless veterans. In our opinion, being unemployed
24 is the first step towards homelessness. So, we
25 started a pilot program with New York City's HRA and

2 the New York City's Mayor's Office of Veterans
3 Affairs, better known as MOVA, where we contracted at
4 the time with New York City to help find jobs for
5 people receiving public assistance such as food
6 stamps and welfare, and after meeting with HRA and
7 MOVA, HRA allowed us to create a pilot program to
8 help veterans living in New York City on food stamps
9 come to our program for assistance. Over a five year
10 period, since 2008, America Works has found about
11 2,000 jobs for veterans, has found work for about
12 2,000 veterans. Since 2009, America Works has been
13 servicing homeless veterans through the Department of
14 Labor's Homeless Veteran Reintegration program. Each
15 year, we're contracted to help about 160 homeless
16 veterans find jobs. In addition to this program,
17 we're servicing veterans through the Social Security
18 Administration's Take it to Work Program, and each
19 year we are seeing more and more homeless veterans
20 come to us for assistance. We feel that we can and
21 we must to more in the city to help the homeless
22 veterans living in New York. At this time, I'll turn
23 it over to Mr. Silverstein to give further--to give
24 recommendations.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We'll restart the
3 clock for Mr. Silverstein, so he has four minutes to
4 continue the testimony.

5 MATTHEW SILVERSTEIN: Thank you, Craig
6 and thank you Chairman Levin and Chairman Ulrich for
7 letting me testify today. This is also a deeply
8 personal issue for me, as I come from a family full
9 of military veterans. And as Craig said, in 2008 we
10 started a program with HRA and MOVA to help veterans
11 who are on food stamps and public assistance like
12 welfare find jobs. Just some history, America Works
13 was the organization back in 1996 that helped the
14 Clinton Administration to reform welfare, and part of
15 that reform was to allow--there was money built into
16 food stamps to allow people that are on food stamps
17 to come to employment services such as America Works
18 to get jobs with the goal of getting them off of food
19 stamps. And one of the recommendations that we
20 wanted to share with the committees is that we're
21 calling for the Human Resource Administration to
22 allow organizations that service people who are on
23 public assistance such as food stamps to use that
24 money to help veterans. Like I said, we were using
25 that money in the past and it was on a voluntary

2 basis. So, people that were, especially veterans
3 that wanted our services they were allowed to come to
4 our offices and seek employment services. This was
5 before the previous Administration made it mandatory
6 that people who are on food stamps come to one of
7 our--come to a service like us. This current
8 Administration, about in July of this year, removed
9 the work requirement for food stamp recipients. HRA
10 accepted the Abled Bodied Adults without Dependents
11 Waiver, thereby removing work requirements for people
12 who are on food stamps. In addition to this, HRA
13 went one step beyond this with the waiver and said
14 that individuals on food stamps who would like to go
15 to work were no longer able to utilize the services
16 of any of the employment vendors such America Works
17 or any other vendor who had a Back to Work contract
18 with the city. According to research from the Food
19 Bank for New York City, 30 percent of New York City
20 veterans rely on emergency assistance such as food
21 stamps. We're asking the City Council to pass a
22 resolution calling on Commissioner Banks and the de
23 Blasio Administration to allow our city veterans once
24 again who are on food stamps to voluntarily look for
25 work through the Back to Work contracts. There's

2 about five million dollars in funding that is now
3 sitting there unused every year, and this is funding
4 that the city of New York will lose and they'll go
5 back to the federal government. And like I said, we
6 were before the Bloomberg Administration made it
7 mandatory, we were going out there into food stamp,
8 into where the people sign up for food stamps and we
9 were talking about our services and encouraging
10 people to come to us for employment services. We
11 also believe that we support the city creating a
12 Department of Veteran Affairs. The Department of
13 Veteran Affairs would be adequately staffed and serve
14 as a one-stop center for veterans. A full department
15 will have established metrics for assisting veterans
16 and could spearhead assistance for homeless veterans.
17 There's about 1,600 homeless veterans in New York
18 City, the second highest amount of homeless veterans
19 in any American city. As the draw down from
20 Afghanistan continues and the military continues to
21 downsize, that number will likely increase.
22 Currently, the services for veterans are broken up
23 among nonprofit organizations, veteran shelters and
24 organizations like America Works who have federal
25 contracts to assist veterans. What is missing here

2 is a lack of coordination for services at the city
3 level. A Department of Veteran Affairs can rapidly
4 connect all of these veterans to organizations such
5 as America Works. And while we respect all the work
6 that the city has been doing, I can say firsthand
7 having worked at America Works for eight years is
8 that we have this federal contract to help homeless
9 veterans, and we almost never get any assistance
10 directly from the Department of Homeless Services.
11 We have relationships on our own with Borden Avenue
12 and Porter and other veteran shelters, but the city
13 itself, DHS does not really provide any assistance,
14 which is why we think that having a Department of
15 Veteran Affairs would be better suited because they'd
16 be able to take the lead on coordinating these
17 services. And also, finally, our final
18 recommendation is we feel that an effort to address
19 homelessness, that New York City should build new
20 housing specific for veterans and military families.
21 More and more veterans are returning to New York City
22 every day from the current conflicts, and there's
23 currently not enough adequate housing for our city's
24 veterans and their families. It's a disgrace to see
25 our city veterans living in homeless shelters and on

2 the streets and/or receiving--and/or when they come
3 home having to go on food stamps. We should be
4 investing in new funding and not just shelters, but
5 residences for all veterans and their families. And
6 we appreciate the opportunity to speak and will take
7 any questions if you have.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Before I
9 ask my Co-Chair to ask a few questions, you know, on
10 a few of the points that you raised, there are
11 several bills in the council which we believe would
12 more adequately address the housing issue. For
13 instance, reinstating the NYCHA preference for
14 veterans, which previously existed up until, what
15 year, 1986 we think. It expired. I don't think it
16 was repealed or anything, but there was a preference,
17 and NYCHA public housing developments for veterans. I
18 know, because my 93 year old grandfather lives in the
19 La Guardia Houses. He was the first--on Staten
20 Island. He was the first, one of the first tenants
21 in the building and he still lives there, and they
22 want to get him out of there because he's all alone
23 now and the apartment is too big for him, but that's
24 a whole 'nother fight. Anyway, the point--he's a
25 World War II veteran, by the way. So, with respect

2 to the permanent housing, the thing that really
3 troubles me is that the city can't maintain what we
4 already have, let alone take on additional housing
5 stock. Affordable housing is a crisis in the city
6 and we need to build more. I agree with you whole
7 heartedly, but we also have to do a better job of
8 maintaining what we already have in terms of the
9 capital improvements and the maintenance of those
10 buildings. What's troubling to me, though, is the
11 part that you mentioned about the city and the new
12 Administration actually preventing homeless veterans
13 who are receiving public assistance from coming to
14 you for job assistance or for help. Are you
15 referring to the WEP program in particular? Is that
16 in reference to the WEP program?

17 MATTHEW SILVERSTEIN: No, the WEP program
18 is only one piece of the Back to Work Program.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So what are you
20 referring to, just to clarify so the committee
21 understands?

22 MATTHEW SILVERSTEIN: Yeah, so basically
23 we are contracted directly through HRA's Back to Work
24 Program, so this means that any New York City
25 resident who is receiving any sort of public

2 assistance, which includes welfare and food stamps,
3 people are mandated--they're referred to us. As part
4 of that money, there is money from the feds built
5 into those contracts to directly assist people, New
6 York City residents that are on food stamps. Now,
7 the city of New York, the new Mayor, he eliminated
8 the mandatory requirement that people who are on food
9 stamps come to organizations like America Works. So
10 what we're saying is that in addition to that, he had
11 also stopped anyone who wants to voluntarily come to
12 an organization for help, which was something that
13 the previous two Administrations had allowed. So,
14 what we're saying is that veterans should be able if
15 they voluntarily want to look for a job, since they
16 have this funding from the fed, that they should be
17 able to come to us or any of the other vendors,
18 because this is--there's about five million dollars
19 every year that is basically being returned to
20 Washington because the new Administration--

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing]

22 Sounds like a bill to me, I don't know, but we're
23 going to talk to the committee councils. I mean,
24 certainly there's a middle ground. Maybe there are
25 folks who say it shouldn't be mandatory, but there

2 are certainly a lot of folks who say we shouldn't
3 prevent any veteran who is homeless or receiving
4 public assistance from seeking job placement
5 assistance or going to find a job when they're able
6 and they want to work. So we don't want to prevent
7 them from getting that if they want to do that.

8 Certainly, that's not commensurate with their dignity
9 and with their military background. So, I think that
10 that's something that this committee will definitely
11 follow up on. Are there any questions from any of
12 the committee members before we move onto the next
13 panel, the Chair? Okay, thank you for your
14 testimony. We'll move on to the next panel. Coco
15 Culhane from Veteran Advocacy Project, John Medina,
16 CVH. I'm assuming that's Community Voices Heard.
17 Right? Okay. Erin Burns-Maine, CSH, and also Peter
18 Kempner, Legal Services NYC. This is the second to
19 last panel. We have two more individuals after this
20 that signed up to speak. So, you may sit in any
21 place you would like. Thank you. Council Member
22 Vallone, thank you. And you may speak in any order
23 that you decide.

24 ERIN BURNS-MAINE: Good afternoon. My
25 name is Erin Burns-Maine, and I'm a Program Manager

2 with CSH. CSH works nationally to advance solutions
3 that use housing as a platform for services to
4 improve the lives of the most vulnerable people,
5 maximize public resources and build healthy
6 communities. Our organization offers capital,
7 expertise and information and innovation that allow
8 our partners to use supportive housing to achieve
9 stability, strength and success for the people most
10 in need. CSH is dedicated to creating the housing
11 and service models that work to reach and house the
12 most vulnerable veterans along with the systems
13 needed to identify and engage them. As we heard the
14 Assistant Commissioner of DHS mention, CSH has served
15 on the Mission Home Leadership Team along with the
16 Veterans Administration, the New York City Department
17 of Homeless Services, Housing Preservation
18 Development, the Human Resources Administration and
19 the New York City Housing Authority alongside other
20 service providers and advocates. Our team has been
21 researching and piloting assessment tools and held
22 weekly case conferencing meetings to ensure that
23 every veteran in a New York City shelter is matched
24 to the most appropriate housing resource. These
25 meetings have demonstrated the dedication of these

2 city agencies to end veteran homelessness in New York

3 City. Over the next few months we will continue to

4 explore evidence based models from all over the

5 country and develop a common assessment tool that

6 will assist us in placing every homeless veteran in

7 the most appropriate housing option as quickly as

8 possible. That said, this tool alone will not end

9 veteran homelessness. Housing ends homelessness.

10 There are two important federal programs to prevent

11 and end veteran homelessness that we heard about a

12 little bit earlier, SSVF and HUD. I'm submitting

13 written testimony on them, but I won't go into it

14 now. But I want to draw our attention to the subset

15 of veterans that will require more services and

16 support to achieve housing stability. Forty-five

17 percent of homeless veterans suffer from mental

18 illness and 50 percent have substance abuse

19 disorders. Homeless veterans are more likely to

20 become chronically homeless, meaning longer bouts of

21 homelessness than non-veteran homeless persons.

22 Permanent supportive housing is the solution for

23 these most vulnerable veterans. Permanent supportive

24 housing combines affordable housing with services

25 that help people who face the complex challenges such

2 as mental illness and substance abuse disorders to
3 live stably and thrive in housing. The majority of
4 supportive housing units developed here in New York
5 have been created through city-state supportive
6 housing initiatives known as New York, New York
7 agreements. New York, New York was the resource that
8 made it possible for programs like the Jericho
9 project to develop Fordham Village and Kingsbridge
10 Terrace, two veteran dedicated supportive housing
11 developments providing housing to 132 of New York's
12 most vulnerable veterans. By almost every measure,
13 New York, New York has been a success. The current
14 program has reduced the Use of shelters, hospitals,
15 psych centers and incarceration for an average net
16 public savings of over 10,000 dollars per year,
17 decreased homelessness among single adults by 47
18 percent in the first five years, and it's also
19 provided stability with more than 75 percent of New
20 York, New York Three tenants remaining housed after
21 two years. More than 20,000 households per year are
22 found eligible for supportive housing, but there's
23 currently only one housing unit available for every
24 six eligible applicants. This ratio will only worsen
25 if a new city-state supportive housing agreement is

2 not reached this year as the current agreement
3 expires next year. CSH and 183 other New York City
4 based agencies endorsing the campaign for New York,
5 New York Housing urge the city to establish a new
6 agreement to create 30,000 units of supportive
7 housing over the next 10 years. Units created under
8 this agreement will have a significant impact on
9 ending veteran homelessness and providing homeless
10 veterans the housing and supports that they need to
11 live stably with autonomy and dignity. Thank you for
12 your time.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
14 testimony. Coco or John, or anybody?

15 COCO CULHANE: Hi, I'm Coco Culhane from
16 Veteran Advocacy Project of the Urban Justice Center.
17 I would agree that I think what we've heard today is
18 that we're solving homelessness on paper, and I think
19 that there's been a lot of talk of veterans as
20 victims, and no one really taking any responsibility,
21 particularly DHS who I think without the VA's funding
22 and involvement in this city would be a complete
23 nightmare for a veteran here. I don't think we've
24 done anything. You know, this spring I had a family
25 of four with another--both parents were veterans and

2 the mother was pregnant. The VA told them to go to
3 the Path, to go to Path. Path, you know, was working
4 on the family reunification that they spoke of
5 earlier, which we all know is a bus ticket. The
6 mother had parents who lived in Nevada, and
7 conveniently, you know, the fact that those parents
8 would not let the father come along was just sort of
9 glossed over. The VA said that, you know, when I
10 actually called the head of the program at the VA to
11 find out why the family had been rejected, and they
12 said, "Well, they haven't been chronically homeless,
13 and we have a quota to meet." Something that no one
14 in this room seemed to realize who worked directly in
15 Homeless Services is that the regulations that
16 require mental illness and chronic homelessness were
17 waived, I think, in 2008. So, the VA, each medical
18 center, I believe, operates under different quotas.
19 And so what we have is a family who stayed homeless
20 and we lost touch with because they didn't quite fit
21 the contract for anyone. They didn't quite fit the
22 numbers, and that's what happens. People get passed
23 around from organization to organization until they
24 meet the numbers, and I've had program directors of,
25 you know, SSVF and other social service providers

2 admit to me that they don't always do what's best for
3 the veteran, because that won't be counted as a
4 success under their contract. And the
5 rationalization is, well, we need to do what we do to
6 keep the doors open so we can do any good, but we
7 have to be doing better as a city. It's ridiculous
8 that a family of four couldn't find help anywhere in
9 New York City, and we should all be outraged about
10 it. I still have the case file open hoping that
11 we'll be able to contact them someday. The other
12 thing I just wanted to talk about was that DHS was
13 saying, you know, these veterans they're working with
14 the MTA. My clients, I can tell you we have at least
15 100 homeless clients right now, and they aren't
16 sleeping on the sidewalk. They aren't sleeping on
17 subway cars because they know how to take care of
18 themselves. They're in cars. They're sleeping on
19 rooftops. They're sleep--they're not sleeping in
20 places where they're going to get assaulted easily if
21 they doze off. And the idea that people's whose
22 career is to work with homeless people that they
23 don't think of that I find pretty shocking. And
24 finally, the third point I wanted to make was about
25 the fact that, you know, within the numbers which are

2 completely implausible that they presented, it's not
3 clear whether or not that counts veterans with other
4 than honorable discharges, bad conduct discharges, or
5 dishonorable. And that that's a huge a population
6 that the VA can't help and New York City will have to
7 help. And legally, they may not be considered
8 veterans, but they still are, and they're still New
9 Yorkers, and we have a duty to take care of them.
10 And I think too often there's a myth out there that
11 discharge upgrades are really easy and they're not
12 being done properly, and veterans are losing their
13 shot at it. So it's something that I think we need
14 to make a priority, and that will also help veterans
15 access the thousands and thousands of dollars
16 available to them. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Next
18 speaker?

19 PETER KEMPNER: Good afternoon. My
20 name's Peter Kempner. I'm the Coordinator of
21 Veterans Litigation and a Senior Staff Attorney with
22 the Veterans Justice Project at Legal Services NYC.
23 Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of civil
24 legal services in the nation with offices in all five
25 boroughs where we serve over 60,000 New Yorkers

2 annually. The Veterans Justice Project represents

3 low income veterans, active duty service members and

4 their families who are in need of legal services,

5 civil legal services in the areas of housing law,

6 public benefits law, employment law and other

7 essential needs. Our attorneys and paralegals answer

8 calls on our citywide hotline and staff multiple

9 legal clinics at VA facilities throughout the city.

10 Since launching this project a few years ago we have

11 provided legal services to thousands of New York City

12 veterans, active duty service members and their

13 families. We're delighted that the City Council and

14 the Committees is holding this hearing on ending the

15 veteran homelessness and hunger in the city, because

16 there really is no great tragedy than seeing those

17 who sacrifice so much come home only to face hunger

18 and homelessness. Each week, the Veteran Justice

19 Project hosts a legal clinic at the VA's Chapel

20 Street health care center, you know, which was talked

21 about earlier where we partner with Project Torch

22 where DHS is on site, HRA is on site. There we

23 actually go to the cafeteria where hungry and

24 homeless veterans come for a hot meal, and we speak

25 to veterans there who live either in the homeless

2 shelters at Borden or in Foster Avenue or in
3 substandard housing and some veterans who are facing
4 eviction. In our estimation there's a number of root
5 causes of homelessness and poverty amongst veterans.
6 Two of these causes are the lack of access to
7 benefits for disabled veterans and a lack of
8 affordable housing for low income veterans. We've
9 all heard the stories in the news about how veterans
10 who applied for service connected disability from the
11 VA must wait years for the VA to make a decision on
12 their claim. While they wait, veterans have very few
13 options available to them, and most often must apply
14 to public assistance. As we all know, public
15 assistance benefits for individuals without children
16 are meager and including a shelter allowance of only
17 215 dollars a month. In New York City, this simply
18 is not adequate to find housing. Veterans on public
19 assistance are forced to live in shelters. Sometimes
20 they're forced to rent rooms in three quarter houses,
21 and in the legal SRO's some of these substandard
22 housing situations are actually funded through the
23 VA's grants and per-diem program that the Department
24 of Homeless Services had testified to before. Right
25 now I'm representing a veteran in one of these

2 programs funded through the VA's grant and per-diem

3 program that has taken a two family home. They split

4 it up into nine different units where 16 different

5 veterans live in bunk beds. And so those are the

6 kind of solutions that we're seeing to veteran

7 homelessness. These people aren't in shelters.

8 They're not on the street, but they're in a legal SRO

9 being funded through the VA and through the

10 Department of Homeless Services. And so this is

11 simply unacceptable. Even if a veteran receives a

12 service connected disability from the VA, these funds

13 are often insufficient to find affordable housing in

14 the city. For instance, a veteran with a 50 percent

15 disability rating only receives 822 dollars per

16 month. While the veteran with 60 percent disability

17 receives 1,041 dollars per month, and it's really not

18 until somebody gets a 90 percent or a 100 percent

19 disability rating where they receive 1,700 dollars or

20 2,800 dollars per month where they have enough funds

21 to live in New York City. One of the remedial

22 recommendations that we have to this issue is to

23 create a subsidy for veterans to find adequate

24 housing, something along the lines of what exists for

25 HIV positive symptomatic individuals with CASA, where

2 a disabled veteran who has service connected
3 disability but doesn't have enough money to find
4 independent housing receives a subsidy through HRA, a
5 special program with HRA where they're able to find
6 to housing where their share of the rent is income
7 sensitive. You know, we cannot rely solely on the
8 federal government. They put a lot of money into
9 grants and per-diem, SSVF and HUD-VASH to address
10 this issue, but we as a city could do more, and we as
11 a city should do more. Like you said earlier,
12 Councilman Ulrich, the meager amount of money given
13 to the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs is just not
14 enough and we should put our money where our mouth
15 is. Thank you very much.

16 JOHN MEDINA: Good afternoon, Chairman
17 Levin, Council Member Ulrich. My name is John
18 Medina, a combat veteran living in Harlem. I'm also
19 a board member for Community Voices Heard. I became
20 a food stamp program participant with Homeless
21 Services Administration shortly after arriving to New
22 York from the United States Army. I first utilized my
23 GI Bill to obtain my Bachelor's Degree from Baruch
24 College, and I started a subcontractor business.
25 This lasted a few years due to President Bush's

2 policies with the economy and I had to file
3 bankruptcy and shut down the business. I had no
4 other means to support and feed myself. I turned to
5 SNAP, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, to
6 have food to eat, and I went to the food kitchens and
7 the soup--food pantries. When I had--this federal
8 program was vital to all Americans, even if they have
9 employment [sic] because sometimes the income is not
10 enough to meet the most basic needs of feeding
11 families. The distribution and outreach of this
12 program to the homeless veterans was urgently
13 required an order to reduce the hunger among those
14 individuals who served our country honorably. The
15 Human Resources Administration assigned me a work
16 assignment under WEP, Worker Experience Program with
17 the Department of Aging because I am receiving public
18 assistance. The problem with this program that a
19 participant receives no paycheck and no earned income
20 credit towards taxes. According to the Commissioner
21 Steven Banks' Employment Plan, this program will be
22 phased out and transitional jobs will be substituted,
23 which means the paycheck will greatly assist those
24 veterans who seek an alternative to permanent
25 poverty. Community Voices Heard and other allied

2 organizations believe that a consistent and
3 comprehensive screening process to help veterans is a
4 better method than using a one size fits all approach
5 to poverty. Many are called to the line of duty, but
6 few are chosen who served and died for America. Let
7 us now who are in power extend our deepest respect by
8 helping those veterans that survived combat, not to
9 be homeless and hungry today. Thank you, Chairman
10 Levin and Council Member Ulrich in your actions in
11 this matter. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Mr.
13 Medina, and thank you to this panel for your
14 testimony. Mr. Medina, thank you very much for your
15 service to this country, and--

16 [applause]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: thank you all very
18 much for your time, and I appreciate your testimony,
19 and we'll take all of your comments to heart and
20 under advisement as we move forward. Thank you. We
21 have two more individuals to testify, Linda Crowley
22 of MFSO, Military Families Speak Out, and Bill Busk,
23 concerned citizen. Thank you very much to you both
24 for your patience, and feel free to begin. Just make
25 sure you hit the button.

2 LINDA CROWLEY: Okay. Thank you very
3 much, Stephen Levin and Chair Ulrich. As a member of
4 MFSO, Military Families Speak Out, we want to help
5 veterans that have served this country and we hope to
6 end all wars that create more veterans, and we want
7 them taken care of when they get home. And being a
8 New Yorker, we know there's a tremendous amount of
9 homelessness here. I really very much enjoyed
10 hearing the representatives of the Administration and
11 Community Voices Heard and Legal Services. I thought
12 the numbers were 1,300 to 3,000 homeless. Now, we're
13 told that it's something else. So I find that
14 interesting that our numbers to seem to differ, but I
15 know that about 70 percent of returning veterans do
16 suffer from traumatic stress, whether it's mental
17 with PTSD or sexual trauma, and a large percentage of
18 those do have drug addictions. One of the questions
19 that I had, and I don't know whether it was answered,
20 but someone just mentioned it, are any of the
21 services that the city provides able to be given to
22 those who receive less than honorable discharges?
23 And very often there was a matter of concern with
24 PTSD while in the service and unsocial behavior and a
25 lot of times that's due to drug addiction. So, many

2 times people on the street may have that sign and our
3 veterans, but they may not be eligible because the
4 first group that spoke said that we send up to the VA
5 and the VA determines whether they're eligible, and
6 it wasn't asked what determines whether they're
7 eligible, if it's already been stated that they're
8 veterans. Are they looking at their, the citations
9 they got as they left? Are they honorable or dis--
10 less than honorable discharges, and I'm concerned
11 about that, whether those receiving less than
12 honorable do get benefits. Representative Charles
13 Rangel brought the attention that the Department of
14 Justice prepares our veterans to be warriors, but
15 nobody prepares them to be citizens returning home to
16 be productive members, and he said that's their job.
17 And I think it's incumbent--he was referring to
18 Department of Justice and I think it's incumbent upon
19 them and us what we can do to make sure that instead
20 of going into from the military to the police force
21 with all that anger and aggression and whatever else
22 and acting as if they're in the military, how do we
23 get them to be productive members, and we know that
24 very often people will not admit as Congressman
25 Rangel said that they have any kind of issues,

2 because they want to get out. How do we assess that?

3 The woman who sat in this chair before, she said that

4 one of the shelters provides services and social

5 workers to do assessment. I didn't hear about that

6 in all the other shelters, and I know we don't want

7 shelters in lieu of permanent housing, but I think

8 that we do need other shelters. I'm interested in the

9 ones that were just mentioned. I wasn't aware of

10 that, but having worked with the Fortune Society also

11 in the past, I know that when you come out of a

12 prison, if you happen to have been in there, you're

13 given a few dollars and sent to a shelter, and maybe

14 you're beaten up. Maybe you're robbed, and unless

15 you're lucky enough to be eligible to get into one of

16 the outstanding programs that do exist, you're going

17 to end up in the street and, you know, committing

18 crimes again. So we want to make sure that there are

19 families of the veterans that are taken care of.

20 Women and families that there's a program in Tampa,

21 Florida that did a very good job with--Tampa

22 Crossroads, I believe it's called, with women, and

23 women and families. And then there's a group in San

24 Francisco, Swords to Plow Shed [sic] that was able to

25 build a little studio apartments. So, we see, I get

2 these notices all over about, you know, Phoenix and
3 this group combatting homelessness. It can be done,
4 even though it is a very complex and costly program.

5 When the article came out, which you mentioned Mr.
6 Ulrich, about the horrible conditions in the shelter,
7 why do we find out about it so late? At what point
8 do people who are with the Mayor's Office do they
9 ever go to visit these shelters and on a constant
10 basis to keep, to see whether things are up to code?

11 How do we, how can we as a City Council or a citizen,
12 how can we implement that, have a check on these
13 places? Because I know that some of them are very

14 horrible. I knew of some people that I helped to get
15 into a family shelter in Brooklyn, and actually it
16 was pretty good, but with families and women they're

17 usually a little better staffed and considerate. I
18 was wondering if, and I think this had been done in
19 the past, if when the planes come home with these

20 service people that we can go out and meet the planes
21 instead of just looking in subways and on roofs to
22 see who's homeless or who's a veteran and who's at

23 this point homeless. Is there a way of going out to
24 meet the planes giving them perhaps a free mobile

25 phone with numbers of the services in there and doing

2 some kind or risk assessment, introducing ourselves,
3 meet and greet? Hey, you know, you're coming home
4 now. We want to make your transition a little
5 easier. We'd like to tell you who we are, and keep
6 up to date. There were a number of groups that spoke
7 here today, and I know for any one group it's a big
8 undertaking, but is there any way that those services
9 can be pulled where this can be done? You get a lot
10 of them at one time. It shows that you care. It may
11 break down some of the barriers instead of, you know,
12 having to turn over every chair and look under every
13 seat in the subway and ask, "Are you a veteran?" And
14 as far as the homeless shelters go, they should be
15 improved regardless of whether they serve veterans or
16 not. And I believe that the HUD vouchers, I don't
17 know if they've been increased, but I know in the
18 past with section eight, George Bush put a freeze on
19 them. I don't know if that's been lifted or lifted
20 just for veterans, but how do we, you know, overcome
21 homelessness if we're not fighting from the top down?
22 Because the federal government supplies the states
23 and the city, and when Robin Hood Foundation pulled
24 out or we couldn't have those seats, you asked why
25 wasn't they--weren't they replaced. I don't know if

2 that's a city budgeting issue or is something to do
3 with the Robin Hood Foundation, but unless we fight
4 for the services for the general public, our most
5 vulnerable in those who served will not receive it.
6 And thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

8 BILL BUSK: Hello? First of all,
9 Chairman, thank you for being here and Council people
10 who stayed. My name is Bill Busk. I live in the
11 Bronx. Before I get into my testimony, I would just
12 like to point out something that Council Member Levin
13 has brought up before about the need that many people
14 have felt for the Council Members to stay to the end
15 of public comment. As someone who lives in the
16 Bronx, and I am looking at placard with a name of a
17 Council Member from the Bronx, I do not see a person
18 behind that placard. But that issue is for another
19 time, which you've been involved with. I've also
20 testified before yourself, Council Member Levin, and
21 Mr. Ulrich, I've spoken to your office about my past
22 history with disability with the homeless shelter
23 system here in New York and with the Back to Work
24 Program and We Care Program, and I take exception to
25 the comments made by the gentleman from America

2 Works. I have testified numerous times and others
3 have that the Back to Work Program vendors and the We
4 Care vendors is very effective. It's a waste of
5 millions of dollars of our tax payer money. Also,
6 placing--I believe it was Council Member Ulrich who
7 asked the question about America Works if they were
8 including the WEP numbers with that, and I just want
9 to make clear WEP is not a job. WEP is not a job,
10 and since this committee is supposed to be talking
11 about homeless veterans, I wanted to stress that as
12 an American I am offended by the fact that when the
13 program WEP was first created specifically the Mayor
14 at the time, Rudy Giuliani, claimed that that was a
15 program for "people who receive benefits to earn
16 their benefits." For America to tell people like
17 John Medina or all the other veterans, "You have to
18 earn your benefits, and by the way, they're crappy
19 benefits." I got 45 bucks a month public assistance,
20 cash. The measly benefits you're telling veterans
21 they still have to earn their benefits. That is
22 terrible. America Works should lose their contract
23 just for making a stupid comment like that. Now, as
24 far as homeless veterans. I will speak about the
25 lack of affordable housing and how current HRA

2 policies, job shortages, and employment obstacles
3 disproportionately affect veterans and increases the
4 number of homeless vets. New York City treats vets
5 better than in other states and in other major
6 cities. It still falls short. Expanding the vets
7 only shelters help, but there's still too many
8 homeless vets on the streets and in the homeless
9 system. Lack of access to help increases
10 homelessness. Now, I testified many time to various
11 committees how I over the past 20 years, New York
12 City's HRA Department has been adding hurdles and
13 adding obstacles to getting help, to getting
14 benefits, and to getting assistance. One of those to
15 me, personally, the most egregious one is the Work
16 Experience Program where people are forced to work
17 and they are not receiving a paycheck. In fact, I
18 was proud of the new Commissioner to finally put into
19 the new program--new plan, the press release that
20 came out last month saying that people who do WEP are
21 "not compensated." And to see an HRA Commissioner
22 finally admit the truth at least that's one good
23 thing. When you combine these HRA policies with the
24 shortage of affordable housing for all people, not
25 just veterans, you have too many veterans and too

2 many other homeless people who prefer to be on the
3 streets or are forced on the streets instead of
4 dealing with egregious HRA requirements, abusive
5 bureaucrats and being denied help. Now, one possible
6 solution that is not being utilized, New York City
7 Housing Department has title and deed to over 400,
8 I'm sorry, over 500 acres of land scattered
9 throughout the five boroughs. Most of this is
10 property that was taken over as abandoned property or
11 tax liens. However, due to bureaucracy and due to
12 lack of funds, no new affordable housing complexes
13 are being built period, period. There hasn't been a
14 NYCHA complex put up in what, 40 years, 50 years?
15 And that's due to laws and money shortage. Secondly,
16 homelessness is triggered by multiple factors. A
17 couple of people have already spoken about, and all
18 disproportionately--all those factors
19 disproportionately affect veterans. I am in post-
20 traumatic stress disorder groups, and when I go
21 they're overflowing with vets returning from Iraq and
22 Afghanistan. I also get various types of treatment,
23 and the veterans are disproportionately affected by
24 both physical health problems and mental health
25 problems. All these obstacles to employment feeds

2 into the increase in homelessness. So there's a
3 connection between vets disproportionately unemployed
4 and vets being homeless. Currently, there's some
5 existing programs that are work [sic], a few of them
6 that have not been defunded. There's the Vets
7 Program, which Department of Labor runs and also VA
8 helps with that is veteran's employment training
9 service. I believe that New York's HRA Department,
10 instead of putting anybody who was a veteran on WEP
11 should be forced to utilize programs like the Vets
12 Program to find them line up with a job. The Heroes
13 to Hire Act is still authorized. TAP is still
14 available. These are federal programs to help hire
15 veterans. TAP is Transitional Assistance Program.
16 Those were authorized by Congress, which gives money
17 to the state which means that locally here you could
18 be utilizing that. Before one veteran is forced into
19 a WEP position, HRA should have exhausted all these
20 venues that already exist and already supply money
21 for this purpose to get them a job, because if these
22 freaking geniuses that get hundreds of millions of
23 dollars are supposed to know how to do this, if
24 they're not using this to get a job for a veteran,
25 how is somebody who is dealing with PTSD--God damn

2 it. How is someone who is dealing with PTSD supposed
3 to be able to find it? How is somebody who is in a
4 shelter supposed to be able to find it, if these guys
5 who are paid to do it, and if you look at their
6 contract, lining up people up with a job is part of
7 the contract. Unfortunately, there were other
8 programs, congressional programs, federal programs
9 that could have been used to help that were allowed
10 to expire. Mainly, the WOTC tax credits, the Work
11 Opportunity Training Credit. Congress allowed that
12 to expire December 2013. If there--I know that I'm
13 talking to local officials, but New York carries a
14 lot of weight. If there is any way to put pressure
15 on our congressional elected to get the WOTC tax
16 credits reauthorized, once again, that is an avenue
17 to push--for HRA to be pushing veterans who are on
18 welfare into work and into subsidized jobs, and not
19 put them into a WEP program. WEP is not work.

20 LINDA CROWLEY: Can I just state one
21 other thing?

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

23 LINDA CROWLEY: Today I heard an
24 interesting statistic by Fed Hough [sp?] who was a
25 member of the Department of Justice and a two term

2 veteran for a number of years. He resigned after our
3 incursion into Iraq. He was talking about the
4 memorial wall in Washington, which lists over 60,000
5 names of service people, and our, my group, MFSO is
6 very much concerned with suicide and post-traumatic
7 stress disorder in some of the people. Some of the
8 parents of veterans who have taken their lives are
9 members of our group. He said that if a wall were to
10 be build, memorializing those who've taken their own
11 lives, it would be much longer than that wall in
12 Washington. And there are suicides surpass the
13 number of soldiers killed in combat. That's
14 startling.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you for--thank
16 you very much for--

17 BILL BUSK: Council Member, if I could
18 just add to what she just said very quickly. Another
19 important fact, people were talking earlier about
20 veterans discharge and that effecting their ability
21 to get help. I want to point out that before
22 recently, President Obama cancelling "Don't ask,
23 don't tell" that there was a number of people who in
24 my opinion served this country very well who are
25 members of the LGTB community who are veterans, who

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2 were dishonorably discharged under "Don't ask, don't
3 tell." So if you're going to let that piece of paper
4 effect their ability to get help, then shame on us.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you
6 very much to this panel. I appreciate your testimony.
7 We'll be taking all of your comments under
8 advisement. I'm going to turn it over to my
9 colleague for final words.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think we are
11 finished. I want to thank my colleague, Council
12 Member Levin for jointly co-hosting today's oversight
13 hearing, a very, very important topic. I believe we
14 received a lot of meaningful and helpful information
15 today from advocates, from the Administration, from
16 my colleagues, and hopefully we can all work together
17 to do our part to end veterans homelessness in the
18 city of New York. So, thank you very much.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 14, 2014