

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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October 2, 2017

Start: 1:16 p.m.

Recess: 3:43 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: ERIC A. ULRICH  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Fernando Cabrera  
Alan N. Maisel  
Paul A. Vallone  
Joseph C. Borelli

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

Loree Sutton, Commissioner  
New York City Department of Veterans Services

Eric Henry, General Counsel and Director  
Intergovernmental Affairs  
New York City Department of Veterans Services

Zoey Chenitz, Attorney  
City Commission on Human Rights

Sheelah Feinberg, Director  
Intergovernmental Affairs  
Department of Finance

Darlene Brown Williams. Assistant Commissioner  
Whole Health and Community Resilience Team, WHCRT

Jamal Othman, Assistant Commissioner  
CE5, City Employment, Education, Entrepreneurship  
Events and Engagement

Todd Haskins, Chair  
Veterans Advisory Board, VAB

Joe Bello, Secretary  
NYC Advisory Board, VAB

Lisa Furst, Assistant Vice President  
Center for Policy Advocacy and Education  
Mental Health Association of New York City

Kristen Rouse  
New York City Veterans Alliance

Mr. Anthony Pike, Deputy National Field Director  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, IAVA

Towaki Korematsu, Veteran



2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Put phones on silent  
4 or off so they don't disrupt the hearing, and we  
5 don't want that being picked up on the recording  
6 tape. [background comment] Okay, we are good to go,  
7 and [pause] Okay. [gavel] Okay, good afternoon. I  
8 am Council Member Eric Ulrich. I am the chair of the  
9 Veterans Committee. Thank you for being with us  
10 today. We are going to be joined by a number of the  
11 other members of the committee. I actually saw them  
12 on their way up the steps at City Hall. So, they'll  
13 be in, but there are several other meetings going on.  
14 So, they may be in and out of today's hearing.  
15 Today's hearing will focus on the New York City  
16 Department of Veterans Services. Boy, it feels great  
17 to say that, doesn't it? Established by Local Law  
18 113 of 2015, which made New York the largest city in  
19 the country with a dedicated agency to those who have  
20 served in uniform and served our country. DVS not to  
21 be confused with DMV, okay, seeks to expand  
22 educational and professional opportunities for  
23 veterans and their family members through public,  
24 private and non-profit partnerships. They also refer  
25 veterans to benefits, resources, and services that

2 are available throughout the city of New York, and  
3 employ an integrative mental health model to promote  
4 the physical and mental wellbeing of veterans and  
5 their families in New York City. DVS has been in  
6 operation for more than one year. Its current budget  
7 stands at roughly \$4.4 million, much higher than it  
8 was under the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, its  
9 predecessor, and it recently hired 30 new employees,  
10 great employees. I will add that. In light of those  
11 recent changes, this is an ideal time to review the  
12 department's rollout, examine the progress of its  
13 many initiatives, discuss the needs of the veteran's  
14 community throughout the five boroughs, and  
15 anticipate future challenges that we may face as a  
16 city. We have several recent accomplishments to be  
17 very proud of such as reaching functional zero in  
18 terms of veterans' homelessness, expanding the  
19 Alternative Real Property Tax Exemption for veteran  
20 homeowners, and amending city's Human Rights law to  
21 include current or prior uniformed service as a  
22 protected class in the context of housing, employment  
23 and public accommodation, and working on issues  
24 related to discrimination related to veterans.  
25 However, we know that there's still a lot of work

2 ahead of us and more work to do, and there's always  
3 ways to improve existing services to ensure that New  
4 York City remains a national leader in terms of  
5 veteran related policy. Today we're—we will hear  
6 from a range of stakeholders including Dr.—  
7 Commissioner Loree Sutton from the Administration,  
8 service providers, the advocate community, non-  
9 profits and the general public in the hopes of  
10 shedding light on the path that lies ahead for this  
11 exciting new department. I would like to thank the  
12 committee staff, our counsel Caitlin Fahey. She's to  
13 my right, our panel—Policy Analyst Michael Kurtz.  
14 He's to my left, the Financial Analyst Zachary  
15 Harris, also to my left and my Legislative Director  
16 Mary Prentiss for their work in making today's  
17 hearing, and as I mentioned, I'll interrupt later to  
18 recognize, which members of the committee have joined  
19 us. I see Council Member Vallone, Paul Vallone from  
20 Queens is here, and I know Council Member Cabrera is  
21 also on his way and Council Member Borelli is also  
22 coming upstairs. So, why don't we hear from the  
23 Administration and before I ask the clerk to swear in  
24 the members of the panel, I want to just let  
25 everybody know how satisfied I am with the

2 department, with the hiring that they've done, and  
3 just the remarkable progress that they've made in—in  
4 terms of outreach. Many of the stakeholders here  
5 remember the days of MOVA very well. They were not  
6 always good days although they were very good people  
7 with very good intentions that they did the best that  
8 they could. The lack of personnel and resources  
9 really held them back, and I have to say that the—the  
10 Department of Veteran Services is just doing an  
11 incredible, incredible job reaching out to veterans  
12 in all five boroughs, and my office regularly  
13 receives compliments and phone calls about staffers  
14 who have helped them, some of whom are veterans  
15 themselves, and how much they deeply appreciated the  
16 assistance that they got from DVS. So I know it's not  
17 perfect, and I'm sure there are lots of  
18 recommendations that people have, but I just want to  
19 let everybody know that I think that they're doing a  
20 great job, and—and Dr. Sutton is doing a phenomenal  
21 job as the Commissioner. I'm glad that Mayor de  
22 Blasio pointed out that will be the first  
23 commissioner she's making history in New York City.  
24 She's the first Commissioner of the Department of  
25

2 Veterans Services, and we're very glad and  
3 appreciative to have her with us today. Thank you.

4 LEGAL COUNSEL: Would you raise your  
5 right hand? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
6 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your  
7 testimony before this committee and to respond  
8 honestly to Council Members questions?

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I do.

10 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Good afternoon,  
12 Chair Ulrich and Council Member Vallone. My name is  
13 Loree Sutton. I, as you said, I'm honored to serve as  
14 the first commissioner of the New York City  
15 Department of Veteran Services. I'm joined today by  
16 DVS General Counsel and Director of Intergovernmental  
17 Affairs, Eric Henry as well as we've got about eight  
18 of our members of Team DVS who are here today. We're  
19 also joined by other members of the Administration.  
20 We've got Zoey Chenitz from the City Commission on  
21 Human Rights as well Sheelah Feinberg from the  
22 Department of Finance in case the question s delve  
23 into fine details in those areas. But thank you so  
24 much for this opportunity to meet, and to discuss the  
25 tremendous strides that the City of New York has made

2 to serve veterans and their families since the bold  
3 creation of DVS with the enactment of Local Law 113  
4 in 2016. As you know, prior to 2016, New York City's  
5 veterans were served by the Mayor's office of  
6 Veterans Affairs, MOVA, which was established in 1987  
7 by Mayor Edward I. Koch himself a veteran. The  
8 change from the Mayor's Office to an independent  
9 department came about as a result of extensive  
10 advocacy efforts by the New York City veteran  
11 advocate community, legislative action, led from this  
12 committee, and it's supported throughout the City  
13 Council through the passage of Introduction 314 of  
14 2014, and subsequent executive action by the signing  
15 of Local Law 113 by Mayor de Blasio. MOVA's historic  
16 mission to improve the lives of New York City  
17 veterans and their families has been exponentially  
18 expanded through the establishment of DVS with its  
19 unprecedented efforts to improve and strengthen  
20 veteran services and resources in New York City.  
21 Designing, staffing and leading a start-up agency  
22 within city government is an enormous privilege,  
23 which Team DVS takes seriously to ensure that our  
24 efforts deserve the confidence and trust placed in us  
25 by so many. As the first new agency in the city of

New York in over 15 years, DVS has worked diligently to not only build programmatic functions rooted in the value of service to others, but also the necessary internal infrastructure necessary to sustain a citywide agency for generations to follow. DVS was stood up in early 2016 with initial funding fro 35 full-time staff. By the end of the calendar year 2016, DVS had count had reached 27 full-time staff. The agency is currently at a headcount of 32 full-time staff. For FY18, DVS was approved for additional head count increasing capacity to 44 full-time staff, which DVS has protected-projected to reach in early 2018. In ramping up DVS' three programmatic divisions or lines of action, the agency has brought on board a talented and diverse group of professionals to match resources with veteran needs. Veterans consistently tell our agency that navigating services is one of the biggest challenges in accessing services. So, at DVS we strive to take the frustrations, hassles and trial and error out of navigation. From outreach and employment assistance to facilitating peer mentoring and whole health services to veteran homelessness reduction, DVS staff members work with veterans one-on-one to help them

2 figure out what benefits they might be eligible for  
3 and how to get access to services. Our direct  
4 programmatic outreach to veterans throughout our  
5 lines of action is as follows:

6 Starting with whole health and community  
7 resilience. The whole health and community  
8 resilience team at DVS matches veterans and their  
9 families with opportunities to connect, to heal, to  
10 grow and to thrive. As part of the pioneering Thrive  
11 NYC Mental Health Initiative led by the First Lady  
12 Chirlane McCray, this year the DVS Thrive NYC team  
13 successfully implemented the Vets Thrive NYC Whole  
14 Health and Community Resilience Program, which is  
15 comprised of two parts. First the Whole Health and  
16 Community Resilience Outreach Team, and secondly the  
17 Core4 Whole Health Model. The goal of Vets Thrive  
18 NYC is to engage 2,000 veterans and their families  
19 each year improving their lives by enhancing access  
20 to a comprehensive range of services specifically  
21 tailored to the needs and strengths of veterans and  
22 their families. Vets Thrive NYC focuses on a  
23 coordinated integration of clinical and holistic  
24 services including the identification of mental  
25 health symptoms as well as overall mental wellness

2 aimed at addressing the full impact of war and  
3 military service on the mind, body and spirit. DVS's  
4 Core4 Whole Health Model shifts the conversation to  
5 concentrate on what matters most to the veterans and  
6 their families regarding the many areas of life that  
7 can affect their health and wellbeing. It is  
8 designed to foster hope, healing and wholeness  
9 through informed access to clinical treatment,  
10 community holistic services, peer and family and  
11 community social support and cultural initiatives in  
12 the arts. The Whole Health and Community Resilience  
13 Veteran Outreach team has exceeded its goal by  
14 engaging a total of 7,176 New York City veterans and  
15 their families and constituents through various  
16 initiatives to increase social engagement and help  
17 seeking behaviors in the context of a peer based  
18 support model. Grounded in the six guiding  
19 principles of the Thrive NYC Mental Health  
20 Initiative, the Whole Health and Community Resilience  
21 Team's multi-pronged outreach approach in Core4 Whole  
22 Health Model. Programs are designed to engage the  
23 full scope of our veterans and their family members'  
24 lives. First, changing the culture. Whole Health  
25 and Community Resilience focuses on changing the

1 culture by encouraging individuals to have an open  
2 conversation about mental health. Mental health first  
3 aid training focuses on increasing awareness of  
4 mental health concerns and connections to services  
5 through education. DVS has successfully certified  
6 six members of the Whole Health and Community  
7 Resilience team as mental health first aid  
8 instructors, and has trained 117 members of the New  
9 York City community in this model and completed  
10 training to 22 New York City agency veteran liaisons  
11 as well as 95% of the DBS internal staff has now been  
12 trained in the veteran and military family, mental  
13 health first aid training. Throughout the remainder  
14 of this year, DVS has several upcoming trainings  
15 scheduled with community partners, faculty and  
16 administrators at New York City colleges and  
17 universities and the veterans community at large.

18  
19           Next. Close treatment gaps. This year  
20 DVS completed the integration of the NYC 311  
21 information systems and the VA crisis hotline, which  
22 ensures that veteran and their families act early to  
23 address mental health challenges, and that families  
24 of and connected to available resources and mental  
25 health services. In conjunction with New York City

2 311, DVS ensured the connection of 141 veterans [door  
3 slams] to mental health services at the VA crisis  
4 hotline, and connected 380 individuals to mental  
5 health resources through NYC Well, and an array of  
6 comprehensive mental and physical health service  
7 providers.

8           The next principle is Partner with  
9 Communities. Engagement in cultural experiences and  
10 the arts represents a timeless connection to our  
11 shared humanity acting as a healing balm to ease the  
12 human suffering of mind, body and spirit. Through  
13 the Core4 Whole Health Model outreach, the Whole  
14 Health and Community Resilience team ensures that  
15 veterans and their families are connected to creative  
16 writing programs, community art workshops, musical  
17 and theater groups, story telling experiences and  
18 other art based and cultural events to help  
19 facilitate the healing process and launch their human  
20 journey towards wholeness. DVS' Theater of War  
21 project led by Public Artist in Residence Bryan  
22 Doerries is a two-year collaborative project with the  
23 New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the  
24 Brooklyn Public Library. This year the project has  
25 completed 16 performances and engaged 2,233 people

2 through stage readings of ancient Greek plays that  
3 serve as a catalyst for town hall discussions about  
4 the challenges faced by service members, veterans,  
5 their caregivers and families. Thus far, there are an  
6 additional nine performances scheduled between now  
7 and the remainder of the year. Bryan Doerries is now  
8 partnering with multiple city agencies including the  
9 Department of Probation, the District Attorney's  
10 Office, the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic  
11 Violence, New York City Housing Authority, and the  
12 Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice to name a few.  
13 DVS and Byran Doerries continue to reach out to arts  
14 and community organizations in the spirit of  
15 collaboration. For instance, in the spring of 2017,  
16 DVS hosted a Veterans Artist Roundtable Discussion  
17 with representatives from the Exit 12 Dance Company,  
18 Arts in the Armed Forces, Society of Artistic  
19 Veterans, Warrior Riders, Lincoln Center for the  
20 Performing Arts, Poetic Theater Production and Bedlam  
21 (sic). Our DVS lead for care (sic) Monique Rada is  
22 constantly reaching out to interested organizations  
23 and individuals to explore collaboration potential,  
24 and we welcome any suggestions for community  
25 organizations, veteran service organizations or other

2 agencies who would be interest in working with us.  
3 There are more than 5.5 military and veteran  
4 caregivers—caregivers in the United States. As a  
5 member of the Senator Elizabeth Dole Foundation’s  
6 Hidden Heroes Initiative, the Whole Health and  
7 Community Resilience team has ensured that our New  
8 York City military and veteran caregivers are aware  
9 of and connected to comprehensive mental health  
10 services tailored to their needs. This year DVS  
11 successfully hosted an event and engaged over 60  
12 military and veteran caregivers to ensure that those  
13 serving in the shadows receive the assistance they  
14 deserve and have earned. Because of the tremendous  
15 work of the Whole Health Team, we are proud to  
16 announce that just last week the Elizabeth Dole  
17 Foundation has announced that New York City is  
18 leading the way as a model Hidden Heroes City.

19           The next principle, Act Early. Through  
20 the Whole Health Team’s public facing outreach  
21 efforts, community forums and speaking engagements we  
22 have engaged with 4,651 individuals thus far this  
23 year. The Whole Health Team conducts weekly multi-  
24 pronged outreach in satellite offices at VA Vet  
25 Centers, New York City Borough President’s offices,

2 student veterans at colleges and university, and  
3 other community and faith based organizations  
4 specific to veterans across the city. This direct  
5 interaction with veterans and their communities has  
6 increased our visibility and enhanced our ability to  
7 help individuals act early by providing veterans and  
8 their families with equal access to care that works  
9 for them when and where they need it.

10           The next principle is use data better.  
11 Through a collaboration with the Substance Abuse and  
12 Mental Health Services Administration, otherwise  
13 known as SAMSA, the Whole Health Team hosted a  
14 virtual implementation academy on advancing suicide  
15 prevention best practices and peer support for  
16 service members, veterans and their families. During  
17 this conference, DVS convened 25 mental health  
18 service providers in a conversation on peer based  
19 suicide prevention efforts and methods to enhance  
20 collaboration and the use of data and technical  
21 assistance from SAMSA in New York City. As a part of  
22 this process SAMSA's Technical Assistance Center is  
23 committed to helping New York City track our outcomes  
24 related to the vital role that peers can play in  
25 suicide prevention efforts. I'd like to say that

2 today we're joined by Darlene Brown Williams. Dr.  
3 Williams is our Assistant Commissioner for the Whole  
4 Health and Community Resilience Team. Please raise  
5 your hand, Darlene. Glad to have you here, and thank  
6 you for the work of you and your team.

7           Next, we're moving onto our second line  
8 of action, Housing and Support Services, and  
9 Commissioner-Assistant Commissioner and Senior  
10 Advisor Nicole Branca is here today as well. I'd just  
11 like to say, Mr. Chair, just for the record, you  
12 mentioned that we had attained Functional Zero. We  
13 are working towards—mightily towards reaching  
14 Functional Zero. We have achieved ending,  
15 effectively ending chronic veteran homelessness in  
16 New York City, but we are well on the way towards  
17 Functional Zero. So thank for allowing me to just  
18 clarify that. The department has been dedicated to  
19 effectively ending veteran homelessness in New York  
20 City. DVS' team of Veteran Peer Coordinators  
21 continue to provide housing support to homeless  
22 veterans across the city. With only four Veteran  
23 Peer Coordinators currently on board our innovative  
24 peer-to-peer housing, only in housing first approach  
25 to providing assistance continues to culminate in an

2 average of 200 to 250 placements into permanent  
3 housing each year. One of the more recent additions  
4 to this model was the inclusion of after care.

5 Thanks for the initial support from Deutsche Bank,  
6 DVS was able to hire and After Care Coordinator in  
7 2016. This coordinator's immediate success in  
8 preventing evictions and providing overall housing  
9 stability to formerly homeless veterans led to the  
10 Mayor, City Council and the advocacy community  
11 supporting DVS' request to baseline this position.

12 Thanks to the support, our extraordinary aftercare  
13 worker, has continued to provide a safety net for  
14 veterans as many struggle with the reality of living  
15 independently again after living so long amongst  
16 their peers, first in war, then in shelter. Year to  
17 date, DVS' After Care Coordinator has provided  
18 assistance to 182 veterans and prevented eminent  
19 eviction for 17 veterans. Due to this successful  
20 track record, city funding for this position is  
21 included in the FY18 Budget. In recognition of the  
22 strength of these interagency partnerships and New  
23 York's overall success in housing homeless veterans,  
24 earlier this year New York City was chosen as the  
25 first city in the country to pilot the use of Veteran

2 Section 8 Vouchers for veterans that have heretofore  
3 been ineligible for the program due to their  
4 discharge status. Together with NYCHA, the VA and  
5 the Department of Homeless Services, DVS is providing  
6 permanent affordable housing and services to a 147  
7 veterans thus far this year with other than  
8 dishonorable discharge status. DVS also continues to  
9 chair or participate in multiple committees and  
10 working groups to reduce the current Homeless  
11 Veterans Census, and identified new housing  
12 opportunities. The Housing and Support Services Team  
13 also continues to provide extensive guidance and  
14 referrals to veterans and military families seeking  
15 assistance with a variety of housing social services  
16 in the city, and secondly, to work with our  
17 government partners on policies and programs that can  
18 open more doors to New York City veterans.

19 Additionally, DVS is proud of its partnership with  
20 the Department of Housing Preservation and  
21 Development this past year, yielding support for  
22 student veterans with respect to the legal  
23 requirement for landlords to accept the basic  
24 allowance for housing integrated in the GI Bill as a  
25 source of income rent for student veterans. This

2 letter is accessible and downloadable on the DVS  
3 website, and may be used by student veterans if and  
4 when a landlord rejects their basic allowance for  
5 housing as income.

6           Moving to the next line of action, CE5,  
7 which is City Employment, Education, Entrepreneurship  
8 Events and Engagement. Pleased to have with us here  
9 Jamal Othman, who's Assistant Commissioner for this  
10 line of action. This year, DVS established under  
11 this line of action a citywide presence with  
12 satellite sites in each of the five boroughs.  
13 Community outreach specialists are trained to connect  
14 veterans and their families to trusted resources  
15 available to them from the city, state and federal  
16 governments. In this way, DVS has engaged and  
17 participated in over 300 community outreach events  
18 and provided one-on-one assistance to over 2,300  
19 veterans and family members between March 2016 and  
20 May 2017 helping to navigate and apply for benefits  
21 such as the GI Bill, New York State Tuition, Veterans  
22 Property Tax Exemption and local housing support. In  
23 addition, DVS is committed to recruiting and  
24 connecting veterans and their families to city  
25 careers, services and resources by upgrading the DVS

2 website for direct access to city job opportunities  
3 collaborating with DCAS citywide recruitment and  
4 Workforce 1 as well as the public and private sectors  
5 to identify human resources best practices and  
6 developing public-private partnerships aimed at  
7 enhancing business, educational, and employment  
8 opportunities. DVS continues to administer the  
9 provisions of Local Law 42 of 2013 by providing  
10 training to city agency veteran liaisons. This year,  
11 DVS provided annual training on veteran and mental  
12 health first aid training, which helps liaisons  
13 identify individuals who may be experiencing mental  
14 health challenges and assist in connecting them with  
15 service providers. Further, DVS enjoys a strong  
16 working relationship with the city's Veterans  
17 Advisory Board. I noticed that we're joined today by  
18 Chair Todd Haskins and Secretary Joe Bello, appointed  
19 by Mayor de Blasio and Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito.  
20 The VAB was strategically selected to sustain a  
21 diverse range of service backgrounds, community  
22 engagement interests and professional expertise to  
23 help facilitate dialogue and action with the New York  
24 City Veterans community.

2 In calendar year 2017, DVS worked with  
3 the VAB to provide four public meetings and a fifth  
4 public meeting will be scheduled in November in  
5 Brooklyn. The public meetings are a valuable  
6 opportunity to inform the veterans community on the  
7 work being performed by the city, and gives us a lens  
8 into the specific challenges faced by veterans and  
9 their families in each borough. We are very, very  
10 grateful for the efforts and the ongoing diligence of  
11 the—the VAB.

12 Moving onto press engagement. DVS has  
13 utilized multiple platforms to engage with not only  
14 the veterans community, but with the overall New York  
15 City population. Since September of 2016, DVS has  
16 expanded its outreach to constituents in a variety of  
17 ways including speaking events generating content,  
18 securing media coverage, engaging social media  
19 audiences and reaching diverse audiences through  
20 print materials. Intergovernmental and External  
21 Affairs, right here Eric Henry our Director of IGA  
22 and General Counsel, is affected—is focused on  
23 effective governmental state-- Let me try that  
24 again. DVS' Intergovernmental and External Affairs  
25 is focused on effective governmental stakeholder

2 relationship and management, and advocacy strategies  
3 aimed at meeting the needs of veterans and their  
4 families in a number of key areas. For example, the  
5 department is actively building upon the pioneering  
6 work led by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice,  
7 and its task force on behavioral health in the  
8 Criminal Justice System, and we are working with our  
9 partners in the VA, the Mayor's Office of Criminal  
10 Justice, New York City Department of Correction, and  
11 legal services organizations on next steps. Over the  
12 past few months as a city we have seen the passage of  
13 Local Law 119 of 2017, which adds military status as  
14 a protected class under the New York City Human  
15 Rights Law and Local Law 120 of 2017, which expands  
16 the Alternative Tax Exemption for veterans. DVS  
17 looks forward to working the department—with the New  
18 York City Commission of Human Rights and the New York  
19 City Department of Finance to connect veterans with  
20 their rights under these new and exciting laws. DVS  
21 also looks to build upon Local Law 23 of 2015 by  
22 evaluating methods to standardize key stakeholder  
23 citywide intake forms to foster self-identification  
24 of veterans and families. In addition, DVS is in the  
25 process of integrating legal and compliance

2 functionality with External Affairs as we continue to  
3 grow into a full sustainable agency. I might just  
4 add that under Intergovernmental and External  
5 Affairs, the community, the veterans advocate  
6 community has been very much involved. This  
7 committee, the City Council we are very appreciative  
8 of the Public Advocate. It takes a team, and we are  
9 very fortunate to work with this team here in New  
10 York–New York City.

11           Public and Private Partnerships: DVS is  
12 committed to seeking out new avenues for  
13 collaboration and cross-sector initiatives to  
14 leverage the strengths and support the needs of New  
15 York City's veterans and their families. To this  
16 end, public and private partnerships is actively  
17 engaged in scouting, evaluating, and security local  
18 and national partnerships aimed at veteran's specific  
19 needs and outcomes. I'd like to just point out that  
20 we've got Cassandra Alvarez. Please raise your hand,  
21 Cass, who is our new fairly recent appointee to this  
22 position, a very, very important position for us at  
23 DVS. Some current projects include launching a  
24 mentoring initiative, which brings together 25  
25 different service providers in an effort to

2 collectively identify and address the peer-to-peer  
3 needs of veterans and their families. Secondly,  
4 launching the Veterans on Campus Initiative, a  
5 consortium of post-secondary institutions, veteran  
6 service organizations, advocates and civic leaders  
7 who aimed to position and promote the unique value of  
8 the New York City based post-secondary education for  
9 veterans and their families. Public and private  
10 partnership is also actively exploring new alliances  
11 that will increase agency capacity and connect  
12 private and public dollars to projects that will  
13 drive productive outcomes for veterans and their  
14 families.

15           Moving onto information, technology and  
16 data. Last year the Department of Veterans Services  
17 connected its—conducted its first accounting of the  
18 veteran population in New York City using American  
19 community survey and Vet Pop 2014 data,  
20 extrapolations from New York State National Guard and  
21 reserve strengths and estimates of non-federally  
22 qualified veterans. The department delivered the  
23 first accurate veterans population estimates as well  
24 as demographic and geographic information that is  
25 available on its website. In addition, DVS installed

2 its own IT network this year, assuring compliance  
3 with industry standards and best practices. DVS took  
4 advantage of having no legacy systems and deployed a  
5 lean mobile technology asset supporting increased  
6 data collection, internal information sharing and  
7 maximum freedom from field staff to conduct outreach  
8 while maintain office capabilities. The department  
9 is proud to be 100% mobile and 100% capable in six  
10 locations across the five boroughs after just one  
11 year. Currently, DVS is in implementation phase of  
12 projects to deliver a department wide customer  
13 relationship management solution as well as an  
14 interactive voice response system to speed phone  
15 engagement. Procurement of Vet Connect NYC, an  
16 innovative online platform that will connect veterans  
17 and their families with a constellation of vetted  
18 service providers across a variety of coverage areas  
19 has moved past public hearing and drafting and is now  
20 in active negotiation. Implementation is anticipated  
21 over the next six months. In conclusion, DVS looks  
22 forward to a robust future dedicated to improving the  
23 lives of New York City veterans and their families.  
24 Core to our mission is the belief that veterans and  
25 their families are our city's leading natural

2 renewable resource, and their strength and  
3 demonstrated commitment to public service will help  
4 New York City thrive. As the department continues to  
5 grow in vision, scope and capacity, we will build the  
6 strongest foundation possible for connecting veterans  
7 and their families with high quality services across  
8 a variety of needs. All of this is driven towards  
9 empowering our veterans' capacity for and commitment  
10 to continued service within our city as great  
11 neighbors, community volunteers, civic leader,  
12 employees, business owners and families. It is  
13 important to note that we do not and cannot work in a  
14 vacuum. The list is too long to list fully today,  
15 but we would like to take a moment to thank our  
16 colleagues at the Department of Citywide  
17 Administrative Services, the Law Department,  
18 Department of Cultural Affairs, the City Commission  
19 on Human Rights, the Department of Social Services,  
20 Department of Housing Preservation and Development,  
21 New York City Housing Authority, Department of  
22 Homeless Services, Department of Small Business  
23 Services, Veterans Affairs, Department of Finance,  
24 Vets Thrive NYC Consortium and Core for Whole Health  
25 Steering Group, the Veterans Advisory Board, non-

2 profit and private sector partners, our veteran  
3 services and advocacy community, and the countless  
4 service providers we work with for continuing to  
5 support our veterans. Finally, we would like to  
6 thank you, Chair Ulrich, members of the Committee on  
7 Veterans for your stalwart support past and present  
8 in pushing the veterans' agenda forward here in New  
9 York City. I would agree with you, Chair Ulrich, we  
10 are making history. There's a lot that we've done  
11 and a lot more to do, but thank you again for this  
12 opportunity to meet with you today. I look forward  
13 now to addressing your questions and idea.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, Commissioner,  
15 thank you s so much for your excellent testimony.  
16 Before I continue, I just want to recognize that  
17 we've been joined by Council Members Cabrera of the  
18 Bronx' Joe Borelli, Staten Island; and Vallone from  
19 Queens for the attendance sheet for sure.

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Terrific.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You know, as I'm  
22 sitting here, I'm listening to your testimony. I'm  
23 reading and following along, and I recall that almost  
24 prior to you entering city service four years ago, in  
25 Late September was our first hearing that I first

2 chaired as the chair of this committee, and we were  
3 in a little room across the street, and there were  
4 five people other than myself, and as a matter of  
5 fact, Joe Bello, Kristen, Rob, Ed Daniels and there  
6 was one other person. I don't recall off the top of  
7 my head who it was. I think—I think it was my friend  
8 from the Brennan Center. Yeah, there were five  
9 people and I—and I said are you sure this is the  
10 right hearing, are you sure this is the right room?  
11 And I know there was a problem. I knew that there  
12 was at that time a historic lack of attention and  
13 lack of funding that the city had paid to the  
14 veterans' community for years and throughout  
15 administrations. It was structurally flawed and it  
16 needed a lot of work, and here we are fast forward  
17 four years later. We're in a much nice room. We  
18 have a real agency, a dedicated city agency that is  
19 doing phenomenal work serving veterans and their  
20 families. We have a functioning, and I—I use the  
21 word functioning because it's very important, VAB,  
22 the Veterans Advisory Board that is chaired by Todd  
23 and—and some of the other members here as well, and  
24 they're doing some really interesting work and  
25 they're helping us with the outreach. At one time

2 the VAB report was simply a compilation of their  
3 minutes that they just filed with the city. Now,  
4 we're actually getting concrete recommendations, and  
5 suggestions legislatively policy wise. I just think  
6 that we owe it to all those who fought so hard for-  
7 for so long for the veterans in this city to really  
8 give them the credit, and I think if people like Paul  
9 Morrison and—who's no longer with us, he's with the  
10 Lord now, and John Rowan who has been so active for  
11 so many years, and so many others. We've been  
12 fighting for years just to get veterans on the radar,  
13 and now not only on—are they on the radar, but  
14 they're really just—they are just doing terrific  
15 things. So, it's—it's very rewarding for me to hear  
16 and receive your testimony today, and I—and I just  
17 want to reiterate how appreciative I am to work so  
18 closely with you and what a great job you and your  
19 staff are doing in so many different areas, mental  
20 health, homelessness, housing. I met a veteran, he  
21 came to my office a couple of months ago. His—for  
22 privacy reasons he shall remain nameless, but he  
23 received one of the vouchers, and he was living in a  
24 shelter for 11 years, and now he's living a couple  
25 blocks from my district office, and we're working

2 very closely with him to help him really get on his  
3 feet, and get the things that—that he needs to  
4 rebuild his life. But he—how appreciative he is to  
5 be able to live independently with dignity, and that  
6 really meant something for this fellow to find his  
7 way into my office, and—and to seek us out, and to  
8 let us know that he was getting the help that he  
9 needed, and that he—he felt like he was able to put  
10 his life back together again. So, you know, we talk  
11 about numbers and staffers and things in the budget,  
12 and that's all very important, and that's all well  
13 and good, but if one person—we're able to save a life  
14 or change a life for the better, then all of this is  
15 worth it. Every hearing, every dollar, every  
16 decision that we make is—is really worth it. You  
17 know, we're going to be not debating, but we're going  
18 to be discussing some very, you know, in the weeds  
19 issues, but four years ago these questions would have  
20 never been asked. There was just—there was just no  
21 way any of these things would even be possible. So,  
22 I just want to sort of reiterate that, and put that  
23 in your minds as we go through it. Great work the  
24 department is doing on public-private partnerships.  
25 I think we need to do more of it, and I know that the

2 city is certainly open to that. I want to talk about  
3 the city agencies and the liaisons, the veteran  
4 liaisons, because I know that you have done a great  
5 job training a lot of those people. I'm wondering if  
6 you can talk about some of your interactions with the  
7 City Department of Health and Human Services, the  
8 HHC. I'm sorry Health and Hospitals Corporation.  
9 You know, a lot of times if a veteran is sent to a  
10 hospital for whatever reason, they don't go to the  
11 VA. They may—they may go to a city hospital and what  
12 type of interaction they're having when they're in  
13 the emergency room if a person is—if they have mental  
14 health issues or if they're having physical health  
15 issues, you know what training or—or what  
16 interactions are we having with the folks at HHC to  
17 make sure that they're sensitive to veterans  
18 healthcare needs and—and the type of care that they  
19 may be eligible for?

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, that's an  
21 important question, and it's one which we know  
22 deserves some attention during this coming year. We  
23 have not yet held specific HHC training, but we're  
24 aware that there are times for example recently it  
25 came to my attention that a veteran was actively

2 suicidal and really in crisis, and there was a need  
3 to obtain information from that veteran's VA medical  
4 health records, and so it highlighted a need for us  
5 to really dig into this area and to determine what  
6 kinds of relationships, what kinds of procedures,  
7 what kind of communication needs to be in place to  
8 really protect the needs of our veterans who may be  
9 hospitalized or otherwise receiving critical care.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I know there's a—the  
11 First Lady has done a tremendous jobs with the Vets  
12 Thrive Initiative working closely with you, and her  
13 efforts to deal with mental health issues in the  
14 city, which really are systemic and maybe this could  
15 be a part of it. So, that's an area I think where  
16 HHC could perhaps work more closely with you to  
17 develop some sort of training or guidelines or things  
18 that doctors and nurses in the emergency rooms can  
19 keep an eye out for. You know, people don't walk  
20 around with a sigh that says that I'm a veteran  
21 necessarily, but certainly in the intake process we  
22 might be able to find some these things out and then  
23 direct them to specialized care that—that HHC doesn't  
24 provide currently. We know that that they can't do

2 everything, right? So, we want to make sure that  
3 they work more closely with you.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I would just add to  
5 that that NYC Well, which was recently stood up  
6 earlier this year as part of the First Lady's Thrive  
7 NYC Initiative. They have veteran-specific resources  
8 that are outlined, and so that's been sort of an  
9 adjunct to our existing outreach work as well as the  
10 311 platform, but it's very effective because you  
11 can—anyone can call [door bangs] 1-888-NYCWELL and  
12 access a trained mental health counselor who can then  
13 sort your situation out with you, and then customize  
14 a way forward in terms of connecting you to services.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think also in  
16 addition to the administration at HHC, maybe dealing  
17 with Doctors Council and 1199, the union that  
18 represents the city's doctor and nurse workforce,  
19 they I'm sure would be very supportive and helpful.  
20 I know that they have weekly—bi-annual seminars and  
21 meetings and things, and that may be an opportunity  
22 for you to reach more folks, and maybe, you know,  
23 make yourself or your team available to have a quick  
24 presentation to them to let them know what you're  
25 there to provide in terms of in-kind of help and

2 other things. I just think there's--there are so many  
3 resources that the challenge for someone like you is  
4 to try to put everything under one umbrella, and  
5 network people and connect people to different spots.  
6 Wouldn't you agree?

7                   COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, that  
8 really is one of the very welcome challenges and we  
9 know that certainly now that we've put so much effort  
10 in building the foundation, bringing on certainly the  
11 bulk of our staffing, we've got more to go, but we  
12 know that communication is vitally important and  
13 it's--it's something we welcome your continued ideas  
14 and enthusiasm for how we could most effectively do  
15 that.

16                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: On--on the subject of  
17 the--the veteran liaisons, are there any city agencies  
18 that do not have a veteran liaison or currently  
19 without one to your knowledge or--?

20                   COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] The  
21 checklist, Assistant Commissioner--

22                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And which agencies  
23 might those be if there are? Just--? [pause]

24                   MALE SPEAKER: Council Member, we do have  
25 a handful that do not. That's because of attrition

2 that happens naturally to agencies. So, what we do  
3 is we work with them to identify new liaisons. So,  
4 we have a handful. I can get you that list.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay.

6 MALE SPEAKER: But typically those  
7 positions will be filled, and when they're filled,  
8 other agencies will also have attrition and  
9 naturally-

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Of  
11 course.

12 MALE SPEAKER: --there's this ongoing--So,  
13 we could provide that for you.

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I-I think maybe it  
16 would be helpful if-if it would-if those names were-  
17 well, the way to contact those people was somehow  
18 made publicly available either on the agency's  
19 website or on your website or just a-just a  
20 suggestion. I don't know if that's-

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes,  
22 so--

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --if that's even  
24 possible, but--

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It's actually on  
3 the DVS website--

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Oh,  
5 great

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --and--and I will  
7 tell you that we have not, you know, had any  
8 difficulty, you know, working with agencies in this  
9 regard, but there is the process of natural attrition  
10 and turnover from time to time, but on the agency  
11 website we do provide that information.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The city's workforce  
13 is filled with former service members worked in  
14 almost every role, cops, firemen, teachers and--and  
15 the municipal workers that are still serving, right?  
16 They're still serving, and the--

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
18 Absolutely.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --and they don't  
20 make a ton of money, but they're doing it because  
21 they love to help people and they love to serve and,  
22 you know, we, the administration and the policy  
23 makers, we have to do everything we can to help them  
24 get access to things that they need. Also, with  
25 respect to the liaisons, the agency liaisons I should

2 say, and with respect to the Human Rights Commission,  
3 has there been any outreach using those liaisons to  
4 let them know about the recent changes to the law  
5 that protects people and housing and accommodation  
6 and public accommodation and other areas. How are we  
7 spreading the word that that law was passed, and that  
8 that is, in fact, a protected class among the  
9 agencies?

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Right. Well, there  
11 was—certainly, there had been a couple of press  
12 events, and we're now working also with the City  
13 Commission on Human Rights for an event in November,  
14 and we'll then really launch a full communication  
15 outreach effort in that regard to get the word out  
16 because it's not to do the good work, and many of the  
17 folks in this room have worked towards that end, and  
18 now we need to get the—the information out.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Perfect.

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: But I was talking  
21 with the veterans as early as, you know, this morning  
22 about this change in the law, and we're getting the  
23 word out one-on-one, but we're also putting it on our  
24 website as well as doing a series of public facing

2 events, the next one of which is planned for  
3 November.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's treat. Now,  
5 lastly and then I know my colleagues have some  
6 questions, regarding the Mayor's Management Report.  
7 In year one of the agency we—we're very liberal in  
8 terms of compliance with different things that other  
9 agencies have to do by law, and one of them was the  
10 MMR, the Mayor's Management Report. It would be  
11 impossible for to measure certain things if they were  
12 still getting up and running, but now that year one  
13 is under our belt, can we expect see the Department  
14 of Veterans Services in the Mayor's Management Report  
15 next fiscal year?

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
17 Absolutely. We've been working this. We're well  
18 aware of this requirement. We've been working with  
19 the Mayor's Office of Operations over the this last  
20 year. We plan to submit our MMR metrics in February  
21 and then we'll roll into FY19 as a full contributor,  
22 as an—as an agency to that process.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Again, I just want  
24 to reiterate, four years ago we would not be having  
25 these conversations. You know, is it going to be in

2 the MMR? Are you going to have 37 or 40 employees?

3 I think there were four employees--

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --counting the  
6 Commissioner four years ago. So, the fact that we  
7 are even into these issues is quite remarkable, and I  
8 have to tip my hat again to you, Commissioner because  
9 the Mayor needed a general to set this up, and get  
10 the organizational chart, and he found the perfect  
11 person for the job because you have got this thing up  
12 and running in lightning time. I think what--what  
13 might have taken years to set up otherwise, you've  
14 been able to do in one year, and I--I tip hat to you--  
15 to your--your capability, your dedication, your  
16 enthusiasm, your intelligence, I really think that  
17 the veterans of New York City are--are in much better  
18 shape today because of your leadership than they were  
19 four years and 40 years ago, quite frankly. So,  
20 you're doing a great job, and I want to again tip my  
21 hat to you and--

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Well,  
23 and back at you, Mr. Chair. You know, we are  
24 blessed. We're blessed to live in the world's  
25 greatest city. We've got a fantastic team of

2 supporters both with this committee, the entire City  
3 Council, this convergence of leadership of the last  
4 three years, the Mayor, the entire Administration and  
5 yes, the best veterans advocates in the work, and  
6 without that entire team effort, we would not be in  
7 this position. And so, thank you for your kind words  
8 on behalf of my team, my staff as well as the  
9 veterans and their families here in New York City we  
10 will continue this journey. It's a—it's a moment in  
11 history that will not come our way again. We've got  
12 to make it count.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, and we—we put  
14 we, me and you and the Mayor and—and Council Member  
15 Vallone and 47 other sponsors. We put MOVA on the  
16 airship (sic) of history and we replaced it with  
17 something real, and something that works, and we will  
18 never go back. We will only go forward and make  
19 things better. I'm going to refer—turn the hearing  
20 over to Council Member Vallone and then Council  
21 Member Cabrera for some questions. I'm going to step  
22 out for just five minutes and then I'll be back.  
23 Okay, thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair  
25 Ulrich, and I have to agree, Commissioner, General,

2 Doctor, and so many of the titles that we're now-  
3 we're all reflecting on our past four years. The co-  
4 sponsoring of the creation of DVS was probably the  
5 best thing that I've been able to do in my four years  
6 and now when we're all out in our communities, that's  
7 the first thing I tell them.

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, I-I join in  
10 our Chair and the well earned praise. It was not  
11 easy, and I look at our advocates out in the audience  
12 and I see Joe smiling and everyone else. Yeah,  
13 there's been 44 years of Vallones in the Council and  
14 this was the first time. So, I have a little  
15 bragging rights when I go home at the dinner table  
16 and see the other Vallones, and I say, hey, you guys  
17 didn't do this. We did this. We did this.  
18 [laughter] So, it's something that we have. But, I  
19 think the interagency no matter what committee we're  
20 on always turns to be for me one of those battles  
21 hopefully in the next four years that we can assist  
22 you with and the other agencies because there's so  
23 much good work going on, but especially with veterans  
24 since we're the new men on the block with this-with  
25 this-with this agency as to making sure that our

2 issues are heard within the agencies. So, in one of  
3 the sections that you brought up and you've mentioned  
4 with Elizabeth Dole and the hidden heroes. I sit on  
5 aging. I chair senior centers. Caregivers,  
6 caregiver support is such an unheralded--

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --almost  
9 forgotten generation that is taking care of those  
10 above and below, and I think there's an opportunity  
11 that we have here to--to really focus on veteran  
12 caregivers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in 2017, and what it  
13 means to be in that role. Maybe just an opportunity  
14 for you to speak a little bit on maybe what some of  
15 your vision may be here for future initiatives,  
16 policy or funding that we can really coordinate now  
17 with DFTA, with our other sister agencies to say this  
18 an across-the-board problem, but now specifically  
19 with veterans we want to focus on maybe some of your  
20 thoughts?

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Council Member  
22 Vallone, thank you so much for your comments and for  
23 raising this important issue because, as you said, so  
24 often caregivers are just overlooked. That's why  
25 Senator Dole named this campaign the Hidden Heroes

2 Campaign. We know that the—the stresses for example  
3 of working as a full-time caregiver are enormous on  
4 their impact on the immune system, health and  
5 wellbeing, the ability to function. We know that  
6 social support often gets, you know, left behind and  
7 the isolation and impact of this kind of work can be  
8 profound. So, when we were contacted earlier this  
9 year by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, this—this  
10 campaign just spoke to our hearts because so many of  
11 us know not just veterans and military caregivers,  
12 but members of our own families or the broader  
13 community here in New York City, and I think that  
14 this is going to be one of those issues which like  
15 ending veteran homelessness. I think in working with  
16 veterans and their families we can take the most  
17 vexing challenges of our city, and by determining  
18 what are the needs, and what can be done better to  
19 support veterans and their, in this case caregivers,  
20 we can then share those lessons, those insights,  
21 those policies, those programs to benefit the larger  
22 community. And so, to this point in this endeavor  
23 I've talked to Commissioner Corrado in brief about  
24 this. She knows that we're launching on this  
25 journey. We're just at the very beginning. So any

2 ideas that you have and I would love to sit with you  
3 and members of your committee, and to brainstorm  
4 this. What we've done to date, which is what I  
5 mentioned in the testimony is we've reached out here  
6 in the New York City community area. We had an  
7 initial event the Intrepid, which, you know, showed a  
8 movie that illustrated some of the challenges of, in  
9 this case, veteran caregivers and then followed that  
10 with a panel, and it was a panel that was—was  
11 moderated by, you know, the folks with, one of the  
12 leaders within the Blue Star Military Family  
13 Association, which just this year established a New  
14 York City office, but other members of the community  
15 as well. We have an individual on our team who  
16 herself has the experience of having been a military  
17 caregiver, and so we are—we are excited about this.  
18 It's—it's—it's—it's an area whose needs and  
19 opportunities are as vast as virtually any other that  
20 I think we could—we could take on in part because  
21 it's been so neglected. I would say also in closing  
22 on this issue, we'll keep you posted on progress, and  
23 would love to collaborate with you and your  
24 committee. I—I feel very privilege that—that Dr.  
25 Linda Davis who has been named by Secretary Shelton

2 to serve as the Director of the My VA experience, she  
3 has reached out to the DVS and has asked me to join  
4 the new advisory committee and veteran families,  
5 caregivers and survivors. So, this at the federal  
6 level will be another way in which we can link in to  
7 learn from what's going on more broadly where we can  
8 contribute to what's going on at the federal level,  
9 and we can apply all of that local with all of the  
10 vast resources that we have to improve things for New  
11 Yorkers and beyond.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, I-I think  
13 you bring up an important topic and I think it comes  
14 up time and time again, notification to DVS when  
15 there's a case opened up or again, we use DFTA as an  
16 example because I-I often with Commissioner Corrado  
17 and others are trying assist in-in getting them the  
18 information they need in dealing with the seniors.  
19 It's the same thing with veterans. Is DVS notified  
20 when another agency is dealing with a veteran? Just  
21 right off the top.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, this and I know  
23 that this is something we've talked about over the  
24 last couple of years. It's something we're working  
25 towards. We're working right with the Mayor's Office

2 of Operations to include questions that--that will  
3 allow veterans to self-identify and veteran family  
4 members to self-identify.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Report for the  
6 ID Cards just for that purpose, but--

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
8 Correct.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --but does your  
10 agency get--like what I'm trying to do is centralize.  
11 It's worked so well in other agencies and that we  
12 have a file kept for anyone that seeks a city service  
13 that now the city maintains so we don't have to  
14 reinvent the wheel every week when someone else calls  
15 up. So, if--if housing is working for housing issues  
16 with a veteran, does DVS get notification that that's  
17 happening, or is that separate kept in their  
18 department?

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We currently do not  
20 get that notification, but the first step towards  
21 getting that notification is to develop the mechanism  
22 by which a veteran or veteran family member self-  
23 identifies when seeking services with the city. So,  
24 we know that that's the first step. That's a  
25 foundational step, but aimed at--at larger--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]

3 Sure they maybe some cases they don't even know  
4 they're dealing with a veteran. So that--that.

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]

6 Exactly.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --that may be  
8 it.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Exactly. So, we  
10 are well aware of the distance we had to travel on  
11 that road, but we are absolutely working towards that  
12 greater end.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think that's  
14 where we have some great work to be done, and that's  
15 where the caregiver aspect because a lot of times the  
16 loved one making the phone call on behalf of a  
17 veteran, especially if it's an elderly veteran. But  
18 I--I think that needs to be done. I think every  
19 agency needs to be notified where a veteran or  
20 someone what--whatever committee we're talking to  
21 should be notified that a veteran's case almost like  
22 a case management system is what I'd like to start  
23 with in the veterans so that there can be a universal  
24 file maintained with DVS with every veteran that we  
25 have in the city. Hopefully, they never need city

2 services, but the—the way the—we're going that's not  
3 going to be the case. So, would that be something  
4 maybe we could—we could work on, and then again  
5 obviously funding that because we want to be able to  
6 get you additional staff to follow and maintain that  
7 information because it's nice to say it, but you have  
8 to have the staff to do it.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. No, I—I  
10 would absolutely be delighted to work with towards  
11 that greater end. We know that the—the greater  
12 clarity that we have on—on identifying veterans both  
13 those who are struggling as well as those who are  
14 really thriving. It's important for us to know as  
15 much as we can about our veteran community to include  
16 veterans' families. I want to always make that  
17 point, which in many cases also does include the  
18 caregivers.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Even with  
20 Department of Finance how many times we—we are told  
21 as Council Members that some is not aware of tax  
22 benefit that they're entitled to. Finance is not  
23 going to freely give that information out because  
24 they need the extra income. Here we have a veterans

2 tax exemption, which our homeowners are entitled to  
3 and now we have an addition expansion of that.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I'd love for you  
6 to champion with the Department of Finance that  
7 information to get to our veterans so they know  
8 they're entitled to that because so many times  
9 they're not.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely and--and  
11 I--I just want to applaud the Department of Finance.  
12 We've been working with them and they've created this  
13 one pager, which will be--it's already on their  
14 website. It will be linked on our website. We'll be  
15 pushing it out to the veterans' community. What's  
16 important to--understand about this most recent  
17 exemption for this school taxes is that if a veteran  
18 homeowner already is registered for the property tax  
19 exemption there's no--no--no action needed. The  
20 Department of Finance is automatically--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's  
22 wonderful.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --kicked that in.  
24 Now, what we--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]  
3 that's not often the case. That's why I say thank  
4 you.

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes. So-so-so it's  
6 a great example. Also with HPD I think I mentioned  
7 in my testimony this letter that we've made available  
8 on our website so that student veterans when they run  
9 into a landlord who perhaps doesn't know that the  
10 housing allowance legally must be accepted as proof  
11 of income, student veterans can just download that  
12 letter, work with the landlord. And if that veteran  
13 still runs into interference they can come back to  
14 us, and thanks to this recent law with the addition  
15 to the--the City Commission on Human Rights. They  
16 can bring it to the--to either us or to they Human  
17 Rights Commission and get redress--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]  
19 Right.

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --which is really  
21 an exciting--I mean that's--that's a--that's a lot work  
22 that's gone on behalf of veterans and their families  
23 that we've got to get the word out to the folks that  
24 it benefits.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Perfect, and the  
3 last question is in your Information-Information  
4 Technology and Data Section you gave us everything,  
5 but actual total number of the current veterans. Do  
6 you have that data? Because I know it was over two  
7 million, but I'm just curious to where we--?

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: 210,000.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: 210,000?

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's a  
12 million, a thousand-200,000.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That's with  
14 veterans the active duty, which is a very small  
15 number as well as our National Guard and Reserve  
16 components here in New York City.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Wonderful.  
18 Thank you, Commissioner, and now Council Member  
19 Cabrera.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
21 much and Commissioner thank you. I want to  
22 personally first thank you for sending a  
23 representative when we had the opportunity to honor  
24 this August a very brave young lady who made the  
25 ultimate sacrifice. She was the first female soldier

2 to be killed in Iraq. It was really a very moving  
3 day, and thank you for--for making it even more  
4 special. I want to focus on a couple of aspects  
5 here. One is in--one, I want to focus on is how can  
6 veterans better strategy--better ways and strategies  
7 to let veterans know about DVS? It's new and I was  
8 wondering have you ever done a Facebook campaign and  
9 just tagging the word veterans to be able to reach  
10 this segment of the population?

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, thank you so  
12 much, Council Member Cabrera. Thank you for your  
13 comments as well as your collaboration and teamwork.  
14 We know that in the area of communication we've got  
15 miles to go. I will tell you, though, relative to  
16 where we were a year ago, now that you mention it,  
17 let me just give a little idea of what we've done to  
18 this point, but we're--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]  
20 Please.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --continuing to  
22 build. One point is that we have hired a--brought on  
23 a film fellow from the New York Film Academy. We h  
24 ad one film fellow for six months I believe and now  
25 we've just welcomed our second film fellow who's

2 working with us to do video clips, which can be set  
3 out on Facebook as well as through Twitter, but in  
4 terms of speaking events, DVS Press and I think we've  
5 got Alexis Wychowski here actually. Raise your hand,  
6 Alexis. Speaking events we've reached out at my  
7 level, Commissioner level drafting content for 43  
8 speaking events in all five boroughs including 22  
9 discussion oriented events, 18 keynote speakers and  
10 three mayoral events. In terms of security media  
11 coverage we've been featured in the news 38 times in  
12 the past year with 13 television interview, two radio  
13 interviews and 23 print articles including four  
14 features in the New York Times. In terms of  
15 generating content the DVS Press Office has issued 28  
16 official agency communications, including 11 press  
17 statements, press releases, seven blog posts and six  
18 documentary shorts, and four transcripts from public  
19 testimony and then finally in terms of engaging the  
20 social media audience through daily activity on  
21 social media, DVS press increased its Twitter  
22 following to over 4,195 followers, a 26% increase  
23 from September of last year to now, and then we've  
24 also increased our Facebook following to 330-3,344  
25 likes up 16% in the last year.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: That's very  
3 good.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, we—we—we—we've—  
5 oh, there's one more. That's not all. Reaching  
6 diverse audiences through print materials. DVS Press  
7 has crated print materials for the agency, but how  
8 New York City invests in New York in veterans, our  
9 brochure as well as each line of action has a—a flyer  
10 as well as programs for special events. Is it  
11 enough? No. So, to this end we invite all ideas as  
12 we tool up for this next year. We've got a deputy  
13 press secretary who's coming on board here in the  
14 next few weeks. We're excited about that. We work  
15 City Hall Press Office. We work with you. We work  
16 with the community, with organizations, and any ideas  
17 that you have we're all ears because we're, you know,  
18 we—we over the last year I'll be frank with you, it—  
19 it—creating something out of nothing in a city  
20 environment is a journey not for the faint of heart.  
21 But we've had the right team and the right support  
22 and we are where we are today, and now we're ready to  
23 just really tell that story, and—and so thank you for  
24 bringing up this issue. I couldn't agree more.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Well, thank you.  
3 Thank you. That's a great start. I-I-I think by any  
4 measure that was—you have been able to get the  
5 message out. I was just wondering you ever done a—  
6 like a pay campaign. So, to Facebook, which by the  
7 way, 300,000 likes is very impressive, but you know,  
8 through Face-

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That's a start.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: It's—no, it's—  
11 it's an amazing start. It really truly is. Anybody  
12 who has 300,000 likes--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SUTTON: Oh, no it's  
14 3,000.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Oh, 3,000.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I didn't notice.

17 [laughter]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay, now—now—  
19 now I could help you with this, but--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SUTTON: [interposing] The  
21 truth is--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]  
23 Okay, I thought it was 300,000. I said wow--

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Oh,  
25 yeah, yeah.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --let me hire  
3 you for the next campaign. So, one of the ways that,  
4 you know, many companies or non-profits get the  
5 message out is to—is to actually pay through Facebook  
6 and also through Instagram to get the message out.  
7 So, it's—it's not—you—you literally are able to  
8 expand your network or contacts through Facebook,  
9 and—and a lot of veterans it's been my experience  
10 they are—they feel safe in Facebook, and—and then the  
11 younger population of veterans they're—they tend to  
12 be attracted to Instagram. I think this will be a  
13 great way to get the message out, and not only, but  
14 their families, friends. But you could start just  
15 with the veterans, I think that—that—that would be  
16 awesome.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SUTTON: Absolutely.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: The other thing I  
19 was going to ask you is because I'm very curious. I  
20 really don't know the answer to this question. Is—  
21 chaplains in the military are often very trusted  
22 members of—of the community, the military community.  
23 Is—is there a way or is a dynamic already in place  
24 with the mental health organizations to work with  
25 these veteran chaplains to give of their time or even

2 get a higher capacity? Because some of the issues  
3 in—in having worked in both fields, my doctorate is  
4 in counseling. I'm a licensed mental health counsel.  
5 I'm also a pastor of a church, and I also function as  
6 the chaplain. I—I could tell you there's some  
7 questions that the mental health field cannot answer  
8 really about meaning, the significance of life, and  
9 other existential issues, which a lot of soldiers  
10 experience. And I'm just wondering if there's—there  
11 is a way or if that is happening where chaplains are  
12 recruited back again to—to—to work with—with  
13 veterans?

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, thank you  
15 for that question, Council Member Cabrera. Let me  
16 just say at the onset, I'm a huge fan of chaplains.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I love to hear  
18 that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SUTTON: It's just they  
20 are really combat multipliers in the military and  
21 here in the community. There's much more that we can  
22 do engage not just our military chaplain population,  
23 although we do work with—with them on a regular  
24 basis, but also our larger, you know, faith  
25 community, the houses of worship. We've really been

2 privileges to work with the First Lady's ThriveNYC  
3 program over the last two years with the Weekend of  
4 Faith to be able to engage I mean thousands and  
5 thousand of New Yorkers to help change the culture  
6 about mental health, and to let them know what's  
7 available and to make seem like the normal thing to  
8 do. If you have a broken leg, you get it set. You go  
9 to an orthopedic doctor. If you've got, you know, a  
10 problem with depression, well you go and—and you get  
11 mental health services and treatment that's community  
12 based and that is—is appropriate culturally and in  
13 every other way for your needs. Assistant  
14 Commissioner Dr. Darlene Brown-Williams she has been  
15 built upon the Weekend of Faith more recently in the  
16 last several weeks, and has moved to provide the  
17 Mental Health First Aid Training. I think that's  
18 been in two houses of worship thus far, but we're  
19 already getting requests for more. So this is a—this  
20 is a burgeoning effort on our part when we say that  
21 we are committed to reaching veterans and their  
22 family members, you know, to—to address the—the—the  
23 physical, the mental, the spiritual aspect of their  
24 service and of their on going journey wholeless—  
25 wholeness. We really mean that, and we're just, you

2 know, at the beginning phase of that journey, but  
3 already it's paying off in ways that are really  
4 remarkable, and I appreciate the-the question.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Well, thank you,  
6 Commissioner. Thank you for your appreciation of-of  
7 the work that they do. I think something that I may  
8 suggest that I seen done in other fields is, you  
9 know, pastors, priests, rabbis, Imams. They-they-  
10 they're very extremely busy. They do a lot with very  
11 little. If there is a package that is given to them  
12 even that message outline, a little video intro with  
13 testimonies. Been able to even do our 30-second  
14 commercial, and also resources, and maybe in, you  
15 know, on Veterans' Day weekend that that information  
16 could be, you know, disseminated to people of faith  
17 and-and even small groups. Have we had support  
18 groups, and which at the end of the day will cost the  
19 city nothing? I mean because, you know, you have  
20 that-that volunteer base. So, it warms my heart to  
21 hear your disposition towards chaplain, and wit that,  
22 I want to thank you, Commissioner for all you do, and  
23 for your leadership. I'm looking forward to  
24 collaborating even more, and with that, I'll turn it

2 back to the Chair, and thank you, Mr. Chair for the  
3 extended time and then Council Member Vallone--

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: (coughs)  
5 [interposing] Thank you. Council Member Cabrera is  
6 the chaplain of the City Council unofficially. So,  
7 we want to thank him--

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
9 Perfect.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --for--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]  
12 Just give me more work. [laughs]

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's right and no  
14 extra pay.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: [off mic]  
16 [interposing] Quiet down, please.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But yes, you're  
18 doing God's work. The harvest is plenty and the  
19 laborers are few, right so--

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [laughing]

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: [interposing] Keep it  
22 down, please.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]  
24 That's--and unpaid.

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, can I  
3 just add one thing, Council Member Cabrera. We have  
4 a--an intern right now. Willa is just waiting for  
5 things to work out for her to join the Air Force, and  
6 she's just a whiz at social media, and communication.  
7 So, maybe we can engage with you, and take you up on  
8 some of your ideas.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I--I would love  
10 that, and I--and I--and I believe that I--I could  
11 connect with some people that will be helpful, and do  
12 it pro bono.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, the Mayor  
14 appointed a Council, a faith council last year as  
15 well--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SUTTON: --and we're  
18 looking forward to really fully engaging with that  
19 council. They've been so instrumental in working  
20 with the first lady and the Thrive NYC program, and  
21 now that we're getting our sea legs, and really  
22 coming up on this second year of operations, we  
23 really look forward to--to the way ahead.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Marvelous. Thank  
25 you.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The city has a very  
3 proud tradition of working with and partnering and  
4 faith based initiatives to provide a host of public  
5 accommodations, and housing and Catholic Charities,  
6 Met Council. So many other faith based groups and  
7 initiatives, and this is an area where I think they—  
8 they should also work closely together with the—the  
9 new department to provide mental health treatment for  
10 people of religious persuasion that could be helped  
11 by it. So, we're—we're very encouraged by that, and  
12 also, I think that's a great idea with the Facebook  
13 ads and the Twitter and everything else. We have to  
14 promote and sponsor and boost and do whatever we have  
15 to do to get the word out that there is help  
16 available for veterans, and their families, and that  
17 they're not alone. So a lot of them don't go to  
18 meetings. They don't go to certain groups or  
19 buildings or places but, you know, they are on social  
20 media. So we have to reach them, and I want to thank  
21 your staff for doing such a great job with Twitter in  
22 particular. I follow them and they're always posting  
23 events and updates. I don't know who's in charge of  
24 that, but doing it.

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: They're an amazing  
3 team.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Who's in charge of  
5 the Twitter handle. You're doing--

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Let's  
7 see. Who's equipped--It's Willard Steen's (sp?)  
8 office--

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Well,  
10 if's--if only--

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --our social media  
12 intern who's getting ready to join the Air Force

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --if only we could  
14 him to work at the White House then things would be  
15 running as--things would be running as smoothly there,  
16 too. I don't know.

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And you know, Mr.  
18 Chair, if I could just add, I think it's so  
19 important, you know, just--it's as important for us to  
20 develop out our social media [door bangs] strategy,  
21 which connects with one cohort of veterans their  
22 families, but we know there's no one-size-fits-all  
23 approach. So, we still hand deliver invitations for  
24 example to the Mayor's Breakfast at Veteran's Day  
25 because we've got veterans who they're not, you know,

2 they—they're going to get the word any other way. So,  
3 we've got to have a whole range of outreach and  
4 events and ways of communicating and meeting the  
5 needs and strengths of our veterans and families.  
6 So, it's—it's—it's fun to—to engage with the entire  
7 community, and then to customize our approach to fit  
8 a given individual and/or family.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I promised the  
10 Administration I'd get you out of here by 2:30 and I  
11 have two minutes to spare.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [laughs]

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, the last—the  
14 last question.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The very last  
17 question and I promise it shall be the last is with  
18 respect to the contracting. I know that this is  
19 still an ongoing conversation that we're having, but  
20 many of the non-profits and the groups that the  
21 Council funds and provides resources for, they're  
22 very frustrated historically that they have to go  
23 through several agencies that don't quite speak the  
24 same language, and we're really hoping that in year 2  
25 or in the very near future that the administration

2 plans on allow DVS to be a full contracting agency  
3 and have a contracting officer. So, is there any  
4 update on that issue?

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There's no update  
6 at this point. We are certainly very pleased to  
7 have gotten the new needs that we requested for this  
8 last year up to a headcount of 40 and, of course,  
9 we're always looking to identify what our emerging  
10 needs will be to sustain ourselves as an agency, and  
11 certainly that is one of the topics that is up for  
12 exploration as well as an analysis and eventual  
13 decision .

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, the Council if  
15 it's not included in the—in the Mayor's Preliminary  
16 Budget, may include it in the Budget Response, and  
17 it's just something that we just want to be on the  
18 record saying that we'd like to see in the future  
19 respectfully. So, Commissioner Sutton, and Assistant  
20 Commissioner, thank so much for being here today, and  
21 for your testimony. Thank you again.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Bye.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Okay,  
24 the next panel will be comprised of Mr. Todd Haskins,  
25 our Chair of the Veterans Advisory Board, Mr. Rod

2 Posada, representing the Small Business Development  
3 Center. Kristen Rouse from the New York City  
4 Veterans Alliance, and Linda Furst. [background  
5 comment] Oh, Lisa. I'm sorry. Right. I apologize.  
6 [background comment] Oh, did Rob leave?

7 MALE SPEAKER: Yes, yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Do you want to read  
9 his testimony or--?

10 FEMALE SPEAKER: I know that he will be  
11 back.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Rob had to  
13 step out, so, we'll-we'll skip over that. I'm sorry.  
14 Lisa Furst. I apologize, representing MHA NYC, VMHC.  
15 [background comment]. Oh, okay. Well, then we'll  
16 have one panel. We'll also hear from Anthony Pike  
17 representing Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of  
18 America, IAVA, and Joe are you--you wanted to testify.

19 FEMALE SPEAKER: No, Joe is leaving.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You, well, you know  
21 what, why don't we do this: Joe, come up. You're the  
22 secretary. You sit next to the chair, and now I'm  
23 the general now that Dr. Sutton sat down. So, it's  
24 still--it's still my hearing. So, you get to sit  
25 there, and then we'll wait for IAVA. We'll do IAVA

2 on a—on another panel with Mr. Towaki Korematsu. So,  
3 we'll—we'll do that after. What don't we begin with  
4 the VAB Chair, and they don't have to be sworn in  
5 right.

6 LEGAL COUNSEL: [off mic] No.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Or sworn out. So,  
8 that's a good thing. Alright. So you begin when  
9 you're ready, Mr. Haskins, Chairman. [pause].

10 CHAIR HASKINS: Are we on. There we go.  
11 Chairman Ulrich, Council Member Cabrera and Vallone,  
12 as well as the other members of the committee,  
13 Commissioner Sutton and other attendees of this  
14 hearing. Let me start by first thanking the  
15 committee both for holding this hearing today, and  
16 also for your continued focus and leadership on  
17 ensuring that veterans in New York City are taken  
18 care of inclusive of and after the formal crating of  
19 the Department of Veterans Services, which—which you  
20 guys were a huge instrumental part of the leadership  
21 of. You've changed the course of history for  
22 veterans in New York City and you should be proud of  
23 your role in making that a reality. DVS is now just  
24 a little bit over a year old. It has made amazing  
25 strides, but it still has a long way to go before

2 it's a fully functioning agency and it's going to  
3 take time and resources. Given that the last new  
4 agency was established nearly a quarter of a century  
5 ago, there is no playbook. Simply said, there is no  
6 playbook. So, we're all learning this as we go, and  
7 so we appreciate all the feedback that you guys have  
8 provided and—and hopefully that ourselves and  
9 certainly the advocacy community has provided. Let  
10 me provide just a little bit of background. I cover  
11 this in my testimony n the VAB oversight hearing as  
12 well last February, but I want to remind everyone  
13 about the VAB's role and mandate. Our obligation is  
14 to all New Yorkers not just to veterans, which is an  
15 interesting perspective to be in. The critical point  
16 is it covers the lens through which we evaluate  
17 policy and make recommendations. We are all veterans  
18 and, therefore, have a bias towards supporting  
19 veterans naturally, and—and making, providing  
20 resources to them. But we make policy recommend--  
21 recommendations based on what we believe is best for  
22 all citizens of New York City. We've established a  
23 vision for New York City to have the most effective  
24 local veteran policies of nay large city in the  
25 United States, and we're judicious in our

1 recommendations. In partnership with the DVS, we  
2 have concluded that our policies will be most  
3 effective if prioritized based on how they support  
4 veterans' continued service to citizens. This is a  
5 guiding principle and DVS has prioritize their  
6 resources with this principle in mind. As a result,  
7 all New Yorkers benefit from the investments that we  
8 make in our veterans. It's logical to question how  
9 these programs, which are targeted at on e specific  
10 population, the veterans, impact all New Yorkers, and  
11 to understand this, everyone must understand and  
12 recognize that whether—whether you like veterans or  
13 not, and I think most people do like veterans, but  
14 whether you do or not, they are unique compared to  
15 other demographics in the city, and I'll—I'll talk  
16 about three principle ways. First, they chose to  
17 make them—to put themselves in harm's way for the  
18 benefit of their fellow citizens, and that in its own  
19 right merits our admiration and support ensuring that  
20 future generations of this country's best and  
21 brightest continue to serve is critical to our  
22 national security and our collective success. For  
23 validation of this concept look no further than the  
24 words of our first president who said the willingness  
25

2 with which our young people are likely to serve in  
3 any war no matter how justified, shall be directly  
4 proportional to how they perceive veterans of early  
5 wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.  
6 With that—with the increase in activity in  
7 Afghanistan and all the rhetoric and action coming  
8 out of North Korea, this is just as true today as at  
9 any other time in our history. Second, veterans as a  
10 population have a variety of attributes, which  
11 attract federal spending and tourism into the city.  
12 For example, events like Fleet Week and America's  
13 Parade, and venues such as the Intrepid, are all  
14 connected to veterans and all generate tourism and  
15 other benefits for the city. Also, the federal  
16 government has a—has a variety of programs, which are  
17 targeted at veterans and which bring federal spending  
18 and other resources directly into our city. The most  
19 well known of these programs, of course, is the GI  
20 Bill, but many other programs exist, and the direct  
21 impact of these programs are the easiest to quantify  
22 economically. The last benefit to the city is  
23 difficult to evaluate, but certainly present. A  
24 wealth of demographic data suggests that veterans  
25 make great citizens. After their transition back—

2 back to regular citizenry, they are more civically  
3 active, have lower unemployment rates, higher wages,  
4 higher education, lower incarceration rates, higher  
5 average earnings and ultimately pay more taxes. As  
6 such, policies designed to attract veterans in the  
7 interest of the city and all citizens of New York.  
8 Let me—I'll give you one example. Mission Home, New  
9 York's--New York City's campaign to end veteran  
10 homelessness is—is a terrific example of how all  
11 these interplay. Since its inception, veteran  
12 homelessness has dropped by over 90% despite increase  
13 in—in homelessness for the city overall. While the  
14 city and its many partners have made significant  
15 investments, the simple fact is the majority of the  
16 direct cost to achieve this were funded by the  
17 federal government. So, whenever we—whenever a  
18 qualifying veteran was placed in permanent housing,  
19 federal dollars were paid to his or her New York City  
20 landlord, which was spent here in the city. Further,  
21 the cost to service the otherwise homeless veteran,  
22 which is a great burden on the city—on city  
23 resources, was then removed. That veteran who was  
24 once on the street likely without a job can now  
25 return to be a contributing member of society, and

2 continue his or her services as a citizen, which  
3 connects back to our guiding principle. Lastly, all  
4 of that experience garnered largely with federal  
5 dollars among veterans can then be shared and applied  
6 throughout the city and other at-risk homeless  
7 populations, which may not be so well funded as  
8 veterans, and the city is made more effective and  
9 efficient as a result of our—our veteran programs.

10 Now, let me turn to the topic at day-at  
11 hand today. The Department of Veterans Services and  
12 the—the oversight assessment. I'll start with the—  
13 the good, and then I'll end up with some suggestions  
14 at the end. So, overall we at the VAB much—much like  
15 this committee are very pleased with the progress  
16 that DVS has made since its inception a little over a  
17 year ago. The following items have been  
18 appropriately prioritized—prioritized, and—and we've  
19 been resoundingly pleased with the success. So, the  
20 first one and I appreciate the committee mentioning  
21 this as well, the success of any personnel—the  
22 success of any organization depends on the people.  
23 While the VAB isn't involved in specific hiring  
24 decisions, we have engaged with the Commissioner and  
25 her team on the process, and we've been pleased with

2 the quality and quantity of the candidates who've  
3 applied for the positions. The mission of serving  
4 veterans in New York City combined with  
5 entrepreneurial opportunity to establish the first  
6 new city agency nearly a quarter of a century has  
7 allow DVS to track some really high quality talent.

8           The next one, Guiding Principles and  
9 Framework. The Core 4 Framework that the  
10 Commissioner and her team have established combined  
11 with the guiding principle established by the VA  
12 that—that I talked about have laid the foundation for  
13 which to establish effective policies and programs.  
14 Further, as a proponent of small government and  
15 judicious use of resources, the DVS has rightly  
16 established itself as more of a coordinating agency  
17 facilitating veterans' access to existing city  
18 services rather than recreating capabilities and  
19 adding redundancy to—redundancies to existing  
20 programs. This makes the return on the city's  
21 investment in the Department of Veterans Services  
22 very high.

23           The next one Partnership, as I follow  
24 into my last comment that DVS has been particularly  
25 effective in partnering with other city agencies as

2 well as public and private-private ventures as well  
3 to support veterans' access to these resources. DVS  
4 has brought together veterans organizations, citizens  
5 and other city agencies and organizations in a  
6 collaborative way, which lifts all of them up, and-  
7 and helps to improve all who are involved.

8           The next one Mission Home. I talk about  
9 this briefly as well. DVS has really been a leader  
10 in the quest to eradicate veteran homelessness. They  
11 will continue that fight as-as importantly as they  
12 have in-in sharing those lessons across-across the  
13 rest of the city that we've learned from our  
14 population here so that other agencies can benefit  
15 from the homeless programs throughout New York City.

16           The last one National Leadership. The  
17 DVS has established New York City as-as the leader  
18 nationwide on local veteran policies. Showing  
19 national leadership on this front is critical to our  
20 long-term success. If New York is seen-if New York  
21 City is seen as a leader in this area, we will be  
22 chosen to pilot more projects for the VA, and we'll  
23 garner disproportionate state and federal and other  
24 resources. This is certainly of interest of all New  
25 Yorkers, and the support that we've seen is recently

2 out of the--the--the Hidden Heroes Campaign, choosing  
3 New York as a--as a benchmark city perfectly  
4 highlights that point. So, New York because of its  
5 great programs then gets more resources throw our  
6 way. So, despite these great successes, and there  
7 certainly are more. The Commissioner touched on many  
8 of them, the DVS has had to date, there's a number of  
9 areas where it could be improved, and some of these  
10 are internal focus items for the department, and some  
11 of them the DVS is going to need the help of the  
12 Council and the administration to provide more  
13 funding and resources. The first one I'll mention,  
14 which has already been mentioned and--and frankly the--  
15 the committee here has been--has been ahead on this  
16 topic, which is contracting--contracting capability.  
17 We've discussed this need quite at length, and I was  
18 initially--personally I was initially opposed to  
19 having a dedicated resource because I don't like  
20 redundancy. However, having observed the first year  
21 in operation, I'm firmly convinced that the DVS,  
22 which I think is the only--actually, the only agency  
23 that doesn't have a contracting capability, requires  
24 its own dedicated resources. Contracting delays  
25 results in programs-- Contracting delays result in

2 program delays, which means wasted resources.

3 Further, there's unique attributes as many have cited  
4 that members in the veterans community have all—such  
5 as veteran service organizations, which are not a  
6 501(c)(3) and which DCAS is less familiar with. I'll  
7 give you a recent example. At our last VAB meeting  
8 in the Rockaway Queens, Michael O'Kane the President  
9 of the Queens Chapter of the IAVA was seeking—  
10 actually getting payments on the \$5,000 direct grant,  
11 which I believe the Council had provided him, and  
12 still—still that was sort of lost in—in the DCAS  
13 process. And—and, you know, rightly so, DCAS is  
14 administrating a \$70 billion budget, but I can  
15 certainly tell you, Mr. O'Kane and his constituents  
16 felt like that was very important. So, simply put  
17 DVS needs more resources to bring this about, and I  
18 ask you guys to continue to push that—push that as  
19 I'm sure you will.

20           The next one, Vets on Campus. In my  
21 testimony at the VAB oversight hearing I highlighted  
22 an excited opportunity that—that in my assessment is  
23 the highest return program yet to be created in New  
24 York City here, and that's—that's—that's On Campus  
25 NYC. As a reminder, New City is the largest exporter

2 of post-secondary education of any city in the  
3 nation. So it's a critical—a critical item for the  
4 city. Few opportunities to improve the lives of  
5 Americans who are so widely celebrated and noted as  
6 post-secondary education, and this is very much  
7 aligns with our guiding principles of supporting  
8 veterans' continued service as citizens. What's even  
9 more amazing is the fact that the federal government  
10 will pay for all of this. So, just simply put, the  
11 federal government will pay for every—every  
12 qualifying veteran to go to school, which is the vast  
13 majority of them who qualify for GI Bill benefits.  
14 Those who seek a four-year degree in New York City—in  
15 New York City, will spend approximately \$200,000 of  
16 federal—federal resources, which we spend on their  
17 education, the majority of which is through housing,  
18 but then a good bit also through—through tuition, et  
19 cetera. This program and supporting this is an  
20 absolutely no-brainer. DVS has made great progress  
21 on this initiative with no funding, with no direct  
22 funding on this program. For example, last week over  
23 80 people representing over 30 institutions joined a  
24 planning session hosted at Columbia University, and  
25 the interest was electric. So, I ask the Council and

2 the Administration to continue to provide further  
3 resources to build this program out, and ensure New  
4 York remains the leader in supporting education, and  
5 veterans should all want to continue their adventure  
6 here in New York City even if they don't stay here,  
7 even if they just come here to study.

8           The next one, Program Evaluation. I—the-  
9 the DVS' staff that doesn't have specific people  
10 aligned with program evaluation, and in order to make  
11 sure that—that our policies and programs are  
12 effective and efficient, they need resources to  
13 measure those. So I ask the Council to—to ensure  
14 that the Administration and their budget provides  
15 resources to do that, and—and please support that  
16 effort.

17           The next one is Communications, and a lot  
18 of you guys I'm—I'm glad as usual this committee is  
19 ahead of—ahead of topics, but in—in my assessment, I  
20 think Communications in terms of the—the—the  
21 capability that DVS has been provided with I think  
22 communications is the area that most needs some work.  
23 There's probably some additional funding, but the DVS  
24 needs to make this a priority, and I believe they  
25 are, but they still need to make more progress in

2 this way. This should include both communicating  
3 within the city, and being able to reach our veterans  
4 whether it's through social media or otherwise, but  
5 also community—continuing to communicate the  
6 successes beyond the city's borders so that we can  
7 continue going for more resources as I talked about  
8 earlier.

9           The next one is Vet Connect. The Vet  
10 Connect, as the Commissioner talked about is an  
11 innovative platform through to which all of the New  
12 York City's veteran services are intending to be  
13 coordinated. We believe we've got the right partners  
14 identified and—and that the critical—and that it will  
15 be critical in getting the funding needed to complete  
16 the program. The Commissioner mentioned that this  
17 should be up and running in about six months.

18 However, the—the—the discussions and the process  
19 around contracting have taken longer than has—has  
20 been anticipated because I believe about six months  
21 ago, they intended for this to be live, and so we  
22 need this—this further highlights the need to—to push  
23 the contracting capability, and I think we need to  
24 continue to push to get this Vet Connect program out

2 there so that we can coordinate all these services,  
3 and resources don't get lost.

4           The last one that I'll highlight here is  
5 the Veteran Owned Business Preference. Most major  
6 corporations have this. New York State has it. The  
7 federal government has it. New York City can't be a  
8 leader in veteran policies without such a program.  
9 DVS could design its own program, but I believe that  
10 much more effective and efficient means of  
11 establishing this is to just extend the Minority and  
12 Women Owned Business Enterprise program, which is a  
13 tremendous program that I think the Council has been  
14 instrumental in-in supporting. They should just  
15 extend that same-same definition to a veteran owned  
16 business. And so this is an area where I'd-where I'd  
17 ask the Council to take action to support that. That  
18 concludes my planned-planned remarks. I'm happy to  
19 take any questions.

20           CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. We'll-  
21 we'll save questions for the end. Joe, did you want  
22 to add anything on behalf of the VAB? No. Okay,  
23 alright. So, why don't we move down the-the row  
24 here, and this is the next panel.

2 LISA FURST: Thank you Councilman Ulrich  
3 and members of the committee for the opportunity to  
4 provide testimony regarding the work of the New York  
5 City Department of Veterans Services. My name is  
6 Lisa Furst. I'm the Assistant Vice President of the  
7 Center for Policy Advocacy and Education of the  
8 Mental Health Association of New York City. For more  
9 than 50 years MHA has provided direct services,  
10 public education and advocacy to address the need of  
11 New Yorkers living with behavioral health needs. MHA  
12 oversees the Veterans Mental Health Coalition of New  
13 York City, a coalition of more than 900 members which  
14 seeks to improve the quality of and access to  
15 behavioral health services for veterans, active duty  
16 military service members and their families. The  
17 VMHC provides education and training opportunities to  
18 individuals from a variety of service sectors who  
19 directly serve or are interested in serving these  
20 populations. Training and educational efforts focus  
21 on building knowledge and skills that will broaden  
22 the capacity of providers who identify and address  
23 the behavior health needs of veterans. MHA and the  
24 VHMC supported the creation of DVS in 2016 to meet  
25 the needs of New York City's more than 200,000

2 veterans, and applauds the agency's ongoing work  
3 particularly with regard to its comprehensive  
4 approach to addressing the mental health and  
5 emotional wellbeing of veterans through its Core 4  
6 Whole Health Model. This innovative model, which you  
7 heard about earlier, provides an integrated approach  
8 to mental health, through its attention only to  
9 addressing the needs of veterans with clinically  
10 significant behavioral health conditions, but also  
11 through supporting resilience by helping veterans  
12 become connected with psycho-social supports such as  
13 peer mentors and social engagement opportunities.  
14 His integrated approach is in keeping with the  
15 current best practices in behavioral health as it—as  
16 it has been demonstrated that the most positive  
17 outcomes occur when supports are able to consider  
18 multiple domains of functioning including social,  
19 emotional and mental health. The VMHC has partnered  
20 with DVS to support the implementation of the Core4  
21 Whole Health Model, and most significantly has worked  
22 with DVS in developing the Core3 aspect of the model,  
23 which seeks to identify holistic services that are  
24 demonstrated to support beneficial clinical outcomes,  
25 but which may not always be offered within the

2 traditional behavioral health services sector.  
3 Examples of such services include yoga, mindfulness  
4 meditation techniques, and other types of  
5 interventions. The VMHC has worked with DVS to  
6 identify evidence based holistic modalities to which  
7 New York City's veterans may be referred, and will  
8 continue to work with DVS to help develop a  
9 sustainable model of delivery of holistic services to  
10 veterans, and also (sic) to their families as well.  
11 DVS is currently working to acquire New York Serves  
12 as it's currently known, which as you heard earlier  
13 is the information referral and case coordination  
14 network linking veterans to a variety of service  
15 providers across—across a wide variety of sectors  
16 including housing, employment and behavioral health,  
17 among others. Upon its acquisition by DVS, New York  
18 Serves will be rebranded as Vet Connect, as you  
19 heard. MHA has been working with the current  
20 Administrators of New York Serves to help support its  
21 efforts to identify veterans with behavioral health  
22 needs, and connect them to qualified providers  
23 throughout the city where MHA is also working with  
24 the New York Serves administrators to determine  
25 effective ways to work collaboardy—collaboratively

2 with an integrated—the services of New York City  
3 Well. The city's front door to behavioral health  
4 services that use the state-of-the-art telephone text  
5 and web based technologies to respond to the mental  
6 health needs of tens of thousands of New Yorkers 24  
7 hours a day, seven days a week, and which is  
8 administered by MHA. MHA looks forward to its  
9 continued work with DVS to support its efforts to  
10 meet the mental health challenges of veterans and  
11 their families. MHA and the VMHC are grateful for  
12 the New York City Council's leadership and commitment  
13 to addressing the needs of New York City veterans and  
14 their families including the behavior health needs.  
15 We greatly appreciate the DVS Commissioner Dr. Loree  
16 Sutton for her leadership and dedication to meeting  
17 the integrated needs of veterans and their families.  
18 MHA looks forward to continued work with the Council  
19 and the current administration to continue to make  
20 New York City a place where the emotional wellbeing  
21 of veterans active duty military and their families  
22 can flourish.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Ms.—Ms.  
24 Furst, and now we will hear from (coughs) Kristen  
25 Rouse, the New York City Veterans Alliance.

2 KRISTEN ROUSE: Good afternoon, Chair  
3 Ulrich and the Committee. Thank you for this  
4 opportunity to testify, and I do want to comment and  
5 in full agreement that we are—we are indeed a long  
6 way away from the—the days of MOVA, and—and thank you  
7 for that. My name is Kristen Rouse. I served for  
8 more than 20 years of combined service in the United  
9 States Army, Army Reserve and the New York National  
10 Guard, which included three tours of duty in  
11 Afghanistan. I'm here today to testify on behalf of  
12 the New York City Veterans Alliance, a member  
13 supported grassroots policy advocacy and empowerment  
14 organization serving veterans, service members and  
15 their families across the New York City Metropolitan  
16 area. The New York City Veterans Alliance was a key  
17 advocacy voice in the creation of the Department of  
18 Veterans Services as an independent agency, and we  
19 have been the premier opportunity voice advocating to  
20 grow DVS' budget to the current to the \$4.4 million  
21 allotted for Fiscal Year 2018. Our membership  
22 strongly supports our continued work to set high  
23 expectations for the role of DVS in New York City and  
24 beyond, and there is much to be optimistic about as  
25 DVS continues to build a staff of impressive

2 professionals and to continue its impactful work such  
3 as the tracking and coordination of care and  
4 permanent housing for homeless veterans. But we—but  
5 we must emphasize before our city's leaders that  
6 there is much more yet to be done. As we approach  
7 the two-year mark from the announcement of—about the  
8 agency, so many of us advocated for, would become a  
9 reality, DVS has lagged behind in its ability to  
10 serve its chartered mission and yield the results  
11 that are appropriate given the tremendous investments  
12 that our community and the taxpayers are making.

13 DVS has billed itself as a startup, which  
14 while initially was a helpful illustration of the  
15 groundbreaking role of this new agency, nevertheless  
16 over time has seemed to only serve as an excuse for  
17 shortcomings or its delayed rolling out of programs  
18 or all of the programs that we continuously hear  
19 about that are still yet to come. As a contrast, the  
20 New York City Veterans Alliance we are an actual  
21 startup and my team members in the room who are back  
22 here—raise—raise your hands, folks. Thank you. The  
23 members—my members in the room can tell you about the  
24 sacrifices that they have made in our start-up  
25 process to make a tremendous impact on a very limited

2 budget. We have worked tirelessly to provide our  
3 community with information and to advocate for  
4 results and accountability from DVS and other  
5 government agencies. We have influenced a number of  
6 local laws, and our members were key to the drafting,  
7 introduction, and passage of Introduction 1259, which  
8 would--will go into effect this November to protect  
9 veterans and military members from housing and  
10 employment discriminate--discrimination here in our  
11 city. We have also trained and supported our  
12 membership as they enter the arena of public service,  
13 and we have done so only because of the support of  
14 some 500 members and donors who have believed in our  
15 ability to get results. Meanwhile, it is frustrating  
16 to see that the agency we worked so hard to create at  
17 this time in our view appears to be vastly bloated in  
18 budget dollars in comparison with the results it has  
19 borne for our community.

20           As specified in this year's budget, a  
21 third of DVS's staff are in the salary range earning  
22 more than \$100,000 a year, placing them within the  
23 top earning 11% of city employees. As the head of  
24 DVS, Commissioner Sutton oversees a staff of now up  
25 to 40, which is in a dollar amount that is only

2 slightly less than what the Commissioner of the FDNY  
3 receives as annual compensation for overseeing more  
4 than 14,000 personnel. This simply isn't the budget  
5 or salary range of a start-up, and it sets a vital-  
6 very high bar for our communities' expectations of  
7 high performance and solid measurable results showing  
8 how our city's approximately 210,000 veterans are  
9 being served appropriately. We—below in our  
10 testimony we list a few of the areas where we see DVS  
11 lagging to meet its responsibilities. I'm not going  
12 to read all of these in detail. It's—it's entered  
13 into the record in our testimony, but we want to  
14 mention the—the shortage of flags provided to VSOs  
15 for Memorial Day. The—that number was reduced this  
16 year. The number of interred veterans has not be  
17 reduced. DVS' Facebook page, for example, was down  
18 for at least five weeks between late May and early  
19 July of this year, which halted its digital outreach,  
20 and it was very disappointing for a fully funded  
21 agency with a budget of about \$4 million. As of this  
22 morning, there are no—no minutes posted as mandated  
23 of VAB meetings since November 2016. The link to  
24 video recordings is a broken link. So, the public  
25 cannot access that information. VAB members are

2 either—there are three of them that have expired  
3 terms of service. There are two more whose term of  
4 service will expire within the next month, and  
5 there's nothing posted on the website letting the  
6 public or our community know what the status is of  
7 that. We—the DVS reported this earlier today that  
8 7,000 veterans and family members have been served,  
9 but we have not see the qualitative data of—of what  
10 that exactly means to—to include the 2,000 people who  
11 are attending Theater of War performances, in what  
12 way are they being served, and--and how are we  
13 measuring those—those impacts of these programs? We  
14 also have yet to see how—how are the agency's  
15 outreach specialists and the work that they are doing  
16 to—to connect veterans and family members with—with  
17 benefits and to resolve issues. How is that  
18 currently integrated into NYC Serves and how will  
19 that be further integrated into the Vets Connect  
20 program? Last year Vets Connect received a  
21 significant amount of funding. This year in Fiscal  
22 Year 2018 they're—they are scheduled to receive more  
23 than \$800,000, and we—we're not seeing the quan-  
24 qualitative data on—on how that money is being spent.  
25 The emphasis on Theater of War, which is a \$1.3

2 million program funded by external organizations and  
3 run by external organizations DVS has nevertheless  
4 spending a—a large and inordinate amount of time of  
5 staffing and resources to plan, promote and execute  
6 these performances, many of which are with  
7 organizations around the city that do not serve  
8 veterans. This program has not yielded clear metrics  
9 of any kind for the New York City veterans community,  
10 and appears at best to be a diversion from its  
11 chartered mission and responsibilities. So, just as  
12 investors in start-up ventures need to see a detailed  
13 accounting of the outcomes they are getting per each  
14 dollar they spend, New York City taxpayers should be  
15 asking the same. We again recommend, as we did  
16 earlier this year, that DVS put into place a chief  
17 contracting officer as we're—as we're discussing here  
18 to manage city funds being provided to community  
19 organizations serving veterans. We further recommend  
20 that DVS appoint personnel—adequate personnel to  
21 manage the growth and function of a fully fledged  
22 city agency to include experience staffing to  
23 appropriately manage procurements and human resources  
24 to ensure that the agency is fully capable in  
25 managing the business of the city agency.

2 Furthermore, DVS must serve as a model for all other  
3 city agencies and offices in its employment practices  
4 and fostering career growth for veterans including  
5 those with disabilities and members of our National  
6 Guard and Reserve. The funding is there, and it has  
7 been there for DVS to focus on growth—growth  
8 strategy, management and producing quantifiable,  
9 lasting results for our community as a fully fledged  
10 city agency—agency. We look forward to continued  
11 dialogue and partnership with the agency as it  
12 continues to grow and work toward this end. On  
13 behalf of the New York City Veterans Alliance, I  
14 thank you for the opportunity to testify today.  
15 Pending your questions, this concludes my testimony.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Kristen.  
17 Thank you very much, and to the members of the panel  
18 thank you. I have just a few questions for the VAB  
19 and then I'll address some of the other points that  
20 were raised. Mr. Haskins or Chair Haskins, at some of  
21 these borough meetings that you're having, I know  
22 you're—you're taking them around the respective  
23 boroughs throughout the city, what are some of the  
24 experiences that people are sharing, if any, or  
25 interactions, stories about their interactions with

2 DVS, or what—what type of feedback are you getting  
3 regarding DVS from veterans in the respective  
4 boroughs, if you want to share or are inclined to?

5 CHAIR HASKINS: Sure, yeah, I would say—I  
6 would characterize the majority of the engagement in  
7 the meetings. Well, let—let me take one step back.  
8 One, the—the—the actual level of attendance is low,  
9 lower than we would like it to be, and that's part of  
10 my commentary around communications. Obviously, we  
11 as a—at the VAB as a body of people who are  
12 volunteers and don't have a staff, et cetera. We  
13 rely on DVS to get the word out about the meetings,  
14 and—and that's part of my observations or the  
15 communications are seen through that lens because I  
16 think they're—I think that's—that's one area in terms  
17 of outreach to the community that—where investment  
18 needs to be made so that whatever, you know, whether  
19 it's VAB meetings or other topics relevant to  
20 veterans, just being better—better positioned to make  
21 sure that they know about it because some meetings  
22 are quite heavily attended and some are not. I think  
23 the majority of the—the feedback for—for those where  
24 we do get feedback, the majority of the questions I  
25 think have been quite constructive, more so than in

2 their earlier days when—when—when sometimes people  
3 got off on a tangent and would focus on very  
4 individual issues. People have gotten much better  
5 about, about focusing on questions that were of  
6 impact to the broader community. Generally, they're  
7 more education oriented. What is DVS doing? What's-  
8 what-what-what programs have been established, trying  
9 to understand the recent changes in legislation, et  
10 cetera. So, I'd say it's much—much—the—the number  
11 of—of new inquiries that we get are—are relatively  
12 low in terms of new topics that are covered. I's  
13 much more about getting educated on what, you know,  
14 what is DVS doing? What capabilities do they have?  
15 How can they help me and whatever group that I happen  
16 to—happen to have, and—and one of the nice things  
17 that has been there is that DVS has done a pretty  
18 good job of staffing each of the meetings so that as  
19 people raise questions that—that, you know, where—  
20 where—as people raise questions they can actually  
21 address the issues right there. We've also had  
22 members of the VA attend as well that—that can help  
23 try and connect—connect people where it's relevant VA  
24 services, right, you know, right on site.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Joe, did you want to  
3 add anything to that? I saw you—you made a gesture.

4 JOE BELLO: Yeah, yeah. I would say  
5 roughly about two-thirds of people who come to the  
6 VAB meetings want to talk about the VA, and because  
7 it's a national issue, we've—we've actually brought  
8 in the VA to answer some of those questions. Some of  
9 the other besides education has been—citywise has  
10 vendors, you know, those things. Just to correct  
11 some of the record, too, the VAB members' terms do  
12 not come up until April of this coming year or 2018.  
13 So, we are looking to have the Speaker and the Mayor,  
14 whoever the Speaker may be, make appointments very  
15 quick to the Board.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I can guarantee it  
17 won't be either of us.

18 JOE BELLO: No, no.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Mine for obvious  
20 reasons, and maybe Paul Vallone's, too. I don't  
21 know.

22 JOE BELLO: And just—I will also note  
23 that the alliance is well represent—represented at  
24 our meetings.

25 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

2                   JOE BELLO: They weren't at the last  
3 meeting in Queens, but they were at the last one in  
4 July, and they did talk about--

5                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Either  
6 was I but I was planning on making it.

7                   JOE BELLO: --they did talk about the  
8 legislation that got passed. So we are mindful that  
9 they are there. Other than that, though, we'd like  
10 to hear more from them. So, that seems to be one of  
11 the issues as well, but--

12                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] We  
13 think what might really help, as Council Member  
14 Cabrera recommended to the Commissioner was if-if the  
15 city found a small portion of their budget that they  
16 could pay directly to Facebook for advertising where  
17 you can micro target and actually select people by  
18 borough, and by branch of service. I mean they do  
19 allow for different inquiries (sic) I guess that you  
20 could search through and then they would tell you  
21 exactly how many people. It's very inexpensive. It--  
22 it would probably be a couple hundred dollars at the  
23 most maybe, and then promote some of the VAB meetings  
24 that way. The other thing, which is a lot more  
25 expensive, but maybe far be it from me to give the

2 Mayor any recommendation these days, but they should  
3 do a tele town hall. I did them several times in the  
4 past. They were very popular, but they are very,  
5 very expensive. I think it cost me one time about  
6 \$4,000 or somewhere in that range just to do a one-  
7 hour tele town hall. It's almost like a radio show  
8 where you dial out, but people can also dial in, and  
9 then you have some--you know, people can ask  
10 questions and you can get them and get to more  
11 points, but considering how many homebound veterans  
12 that we have that aren't able to make it to events,  
13 but may have legitimate concerns or issues, it might  
14 be something that they want to do in the future, but  
15 the tele town halls are very popular, and sometimes  
16 they're a lot of fun, and you can screen some of the  
17 people so that you're actually getting to more  
18 people, and you're not getting stuck on a person with  
19 a very particular issue. But, some--and--and I hear a  
20 constant theme here and I think this--the  
21 Administration hears a theme here today about  
22 communication, and they know they need to improve on  
23 the communication. There are ways that they can  
24 improve communication, and I'm--I'm pretty confident

2 that they will, because it's very constructive  
3 recommendation. Yeah, Joe.

4 JOE BELLO: Yeah, just the last thing I  
5 want to say is I—I cannot tell you what DVS does when  
6 I—when they—when they—when they get the minutes or  
7 what they do with the video. On that part I agree  
8 with Kristen, but as the Secretary, I can assure you  
9 I have submitted all the minutes.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay.

11 JOE BELLO: I work with Todd on the  
12 Annual Report. Our—our--administrative wise the VAB  
13 is good.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I have a feeling the  
15 minutes will be up by tomorrow. I don't know but  
16 [laughter] I have a feeling that all the minutes that  
17 you've submitted will be. You know what might make  
18 it easier is maybe you email the minutes in addition  
19 to printing it out and make it just, you know,  
20 convert it to PDF and upload it. I don't know. I'm  
21 just-

22 JOE BELLO: [interposing] We do--

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --I don't—I don't  
24 need to know how to make the sausages. I just want  
25 to eat them. [laughter] So, but I think that again

2 just put everything into perspective. Four years  
3 ago, five of us were sitting in a room, and Mr.  
4 Daniels is also with the Lord now. He's—he's no  
5 longer with us, but when I first walked in, I said  
6 where the hell am I, and—and now look at—look at all  
7 the stakeholders. Look at all the people and many of  
8 whom aren't getting paid to be here. They took off  
9 from work because they care about veterans and they  
10 know that we can do something to help them, and are  
11 doing stuff to help them. There is some growing  
12 pains. I would probably categorize some of Kristen's  
13 remarks. The only one I—I kind of disagree with is  
14 the salary range. It is a very expensive city to  
15 live in, and if you want to attract the best talent,  
16 if you really care about veterans, and I know you do  
17 certainly and I do as well, you have to pay people  
18 commensurate with their experience, and it's just so  
19 hard even when you're paying \$100,000 to attract the  
20 type of talent that you need some of which requires a  
21 very, you know, a highly educated or sophisticated  
22 training in a particular field, and I don't gripe  
23 them for that. At one time I used to attack MOVA  
24 because half of their budget was the Commissioner's  
25 salary, and I said there's something wrong with that,

2 right? I meant that was an--an issue, but the--the  
3 Police Department, the Fire Department, the  
4 Sanitation Department, as you pointed out, they have  
5 a senior staff and they also get paid a lot of money,  
6 but if they were to go into the private field, the  
7 private sector, which many of them do after they  
8 retire, they're making twice the money as consultants  
9 and--and do other things. So, I will defend their  
10 right to pay people what they're worth, and I want  
11 them to pay commensurate fair wages and good  
12 salaries, but I want them to hire very good people,  
13 which I think they've done. I haven't--I--in every  
14 single instance that my office or me--myself that  
15 we've interacted with someone at DVS, and most of the  
16 time it's not the Commissioner. It's one of the  
17 people that's you hired. They have been responsive.  
18 They've been helpful. They've been respectful,  
19 polite, even with some of the people that are just  
20 very difficult to deal with, they have just handed  
21 themselves with remarkable composure, and I just, you  
22 know, it's-- They've got a tough job, but I think  
23 they're doing a good job by and large.

24 KRISTEN ROUSE: If I might--

25 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Kristen.

2 KRISTEN ROUSE: --follow up on that, but  
3 also it's the--just to clarify, Councilman, that it's--  
4 it's--it's not that we don't want people duly  
5 compensated for--for their good work and their great  
6 experience, and it is that with high salaries comes  
7 high--come high expectations for results, and--and to  
8 be in sort of the second year of--of hearing a lot  
9 comments well, we're getting it. Well, this is six  
10 months later. You know, for--for example, the--the--

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] But  
12 the Vets--the Vets Connect issue, I--I intentionally  
13 didn't bring it up. I know it was mentioned. We're  
14 going to bring that up with budget hearing because it  
15 was included in the budget last--

16 KRISTEN ROUSE: [interposing] Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --year, well this  
18 fiscal year, you know--

19 KRISTEN ROUSE: 2017. It's the year  
20 2017.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: 2017, and that will  
22 be a hot topic at the Preliminary Budget hearing in  
23 the spring because we're going to be expecting to  
24 see, you know, where they are in the contracting  
25 part. Hopefully at the point they're fully

2 contracted and—and it will be rolled out in—in  
3 phases. I mean we're very eager to—to see how that  
4 works because I—I don't think any other city has ever  
5 tried this before from—I mean a city as large as New  
6 York. So—

7 KRISTEN ROUSE: It's going to be the  
8 first.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, it—I expect  
10 there to be some growing pains there, too, but--

11 KRISTEN ROUSE: Or even—or even just the  
12 basic communications of having the correct  
13 information on the website.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] But--

15 KRISTEN ROUSE: I appreciate—I appreciate  
16 hearing what VAB is actually doing, but what is on  
17 the website is—is and I understand it's not under  
18 VAB's control.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] A fair  
20 point.

21 KRISTEN ROUSE: It is not correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, no--

23 KRISTEN ROUSE: [interposing] And so—so,  
24 I'm glad that we have a hearing like this to update  
25 the already actual information.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You are—you are  
3 correct and like I said, I'm sure some of that  
4 information will be up probably knowing Dr. Sutton,  
5 it will probably be up later today or tomorrow at the  
6 latest, but in terms of the minutes and things, and  
7 contact information. That's very important but, you  
8 know, getting back to the overarching theme, the only  
9 criticism that I really hear today is regarding  
10 communication, and I have to say, you know, it works  
11 both ways. The good work that they do, they should  
12 be putting up press releases and—and letting people  
13 know some of the good things that they're doing,  
14 getting the word out there so that people know that  
15 the department exists. So, it's not just the, you  
16 know, communication in a negative way. It's also in  
17 a positive way. We have to sort of reinforce in the  
18 public's mind the good work that the agency is doing,  
19 and, you know, their press shop, you know, needs to  
20 send that to the local papers and to the dailies.  
21 And part of the problem is, Kristen, as you know, in  
22 this city the press has an appetite for veterans  
23 issues twice a year: Veterans Day and Memorial Day,  
24 and for us it's a concern all year round and, you  
25 know, we send press releases, and they don't make the

2 papers and it's not always our fault, but-but we  
3 still have to send them, and communicate there.

4 KRISTEN ROUSE: And also for the record,  
5 the-you know, if DVS wanted to work with community  
6 partner such as the New York City Veterans Alliance  
7 on potentially joint releases, partnerships, I mean  
8 this is another way to get in the media. My  
9 organization was just mentioned on CNN. I mean it's  
10 not like the-the work is-the appetite is out there  
11 for the right angle of the stories, and that's  
12 something that, you know, we could work together on.  
13 We, you know, the alliance has a-has a-has-we have  
14 worked, you know, on a very limited budget to create  
15 a large media outreach. We have an email list of  
16 more than 8,000 that we are glad to publicize VAB  
17 meetings and encourage all members of the community,  
18 you know, all members of the community to attend any  
19 VAB meetings-VAB meetings when they happen, and I  
20 have also previously offered to the VAB to-to  
21 publicize other-other associated events. We've  
22 talked about this

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

24 KRISTEN ROUSE: And we-we're glad to  
25 publicize more information from DVS and--

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] I'm--

3 KRISTEN ROUSE: --we--we have--we've, you  
4 know, our Facebook outreach we can--we can help to  
5 augment--

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] I  
7 would hope that--

8 KRISTEN ROUSE: --if--if we were to work  
9 together.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --that you would  
11 reconsider, not to air laundry or anything, but I  
12 would hope that you would reconsider your previous  
13 decision to serve on the VAB because I know that the  
14 Speaker wanted to appoint you in particular to serve  
15 on the VAB, and at the time you had a million other  
16 things going on and, you know, you were stretched  
17 pretty thin in your commitments, but in the future I  
18 think that you would be a strong asset to the VAB,  
19 and I think one of the ways to improve the VAB and to  
20 approve DVS is to become a--a part of it, and I would  
21 hope that you might consider that because you have a  
22 wealth of knowledge, experience, expertise and a  
23 network that I don't have, and--and Todd Haskins  
24 doesn't have and Dr. Sutton doesn't have, and I think  
25 that we really need to tap into that. I--I hope you

2 would lend yourself to at least considering it,  
3 because I would personally make the case to whoever  
4 the Speaker is, again, it won't be me or Paul  
5 Vallone. I just took him out of the race.

6 [laughter] I just took him out of the race for-

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: He goes in an  
8 out. (sic)

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But I would  
10 personally lobby very strongly to see you appointed  
11 to the VAB because every voice counts, and it's not  
12 about group think, and your testimony today is very  
13 valid and very helpful because every opinion counts  
14 and every voice counts, and you even having the  
15 courage to come here every month and testify and  
16 sometimes it's in favor of what we're doing, and  
17 sometimes it's not. I commend you and I thank you  
18 because you I believe you are a very courageous  
19 person, and I respect and admire you personally, and  
20 I want you to help me make these things better. So,  
21 that's my opinion.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]  
23 I'll join in that, Chair. Thank you to you and the  
24 advocates, and as we may not be the Speaker, we

2 certainly chose to be on the Veterans. This is where  
3 our heart is. That's why we're always so--

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I may not be  
5 chair, don't forget.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [laughs]

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So there's new  
8 chairs and--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: A lot of things  
10 mentioned.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --everything else.

12 So, sometimes the devil (sic) you know, you know,  
13 they say. Anyway. Alright, why don't we get to the  
14 next panel. Thank you. Thank you so much, all of--  
15 and Lisa, thank you as well. Thank you. Alright the  
16 last panel we'll hear is Mr. Anthony Pike  
17 representing IAVA, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of  
18 America, and also Mr. Towaki Korematsu (sp?)  
19 representing himself. Mr. Pike and Mr. Korematsu.  
20 Thank you, Commissioner, thank you. [background  
21 comment] Okay, I know there--there are some other  
22 folks that are going to stay form DVS, right, for the  
23 last panel? Oh, great. Alright. [background  
24 comment] I have a feeling somebody, yeah, alright.  
25 Issues might come up that you could help address.

2 Okay. Okay. [background noise, pause] Okay, we will  
3 just go in the order that people have signed up to  
4 speak. So, we'll start with Mr. Pike and we will—and  
5 with Mr. Korematsu if that's alright. [pause]

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The microphone  
7 is working? Perfect. Thank you, Chairman Ulrich,  
8 and distinguished members of the committee. On  
9 behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America,  
10 and our more than 400,000 members, I would like to  
11 thank you for the opportunity to testify here today  
12 on the oversight of the new New York City Department  
13 of Veterans Services. My name is Anthony Pike, and I  
14 am the Deputy National Field Director at Iraq and  
15 Afghanistan Veterans of America. I am also a Marine  
16 Corps veteran who has served two tours in Iraq. After  
17 13 years, IAVA has become the preferred empowerment  
18 organization for post-9/11 veterans. While our  
19 members are spread throughout the nation, we are  
20 proud to say that our national headquarters is  
21 located right here in the great city of New York.  
22 Since it's beginning, IAVA has fought for and has  
23 been successful in advocating for policies that are  
24 able to meet the needs of our newest generation of  
25 veterans, which includes our advocacy towards the

2 creation of the DVS. A great deal of IV-IAVA's  
3 advocacy pertains to fighting to empower veterans in  
4 Washington, D.C. However, it is also our view that  
5 helping veterans return home is the responsibility of  
6 all Americans, which includes state and local  
7 governments. That is why DVS is so important. For  
8 veterans who live in New York City DVS has enormous  
9 potential to assist them in obtaining housing and  
10 employment, expanding their educational  
11 opportunities, and promoting their transition from  
12 military to civilian life among other matters. Our  
13 primary concerns regarding DVS in this particular  
14 oversight hearing are that while DVS is well manned  
15 and funded, DVS has not had the overall positive  
16 impact that New York City veterans and taxpayers  
17 expect them to. This is unacceptable, and it is  
18 exactly why vigorous oversight by this committee is  
19 needed. In advocating within the halls of  
20 Washington, D.C. IAVA has found that strong  
21 government oversight is critical in ensuring that  
22 =veterans get the benefits they need, and that those  
23 benefits have a positive impact on their lives. This  
24 oversight conducted properly does justice to both  
25 veterans and the public servants that serve them.

2 Oversight ensure that an agency is faithfully  
3 executing the policies it is responsible for that the  
4 public servants that work within an agency are  
5 adequately empowered to do their jobs, and that the  
6 agencies' clients, in this case the New York City  
7 veterans, are receiving positive outcomes in  
8 utilizing the agency's services. With an adopted  
9 budget of \$4.4 million for the next fiscal year, DVS  
10 should be at the forefront of caring for and  
11 empowering New York City veterans. However, this has  
12 not been the case. Many IAVA veterans have reached  
13 out to our own rapid response referral program to  
14 share the shortfalls of DVS in serving veterans. One  
15 of these shortfalls is that the—is the disconnect  
16 between DVS employees and New York City veterans and  
17 advocates to include IAVA. Several New York City  
18 veteran advocates have told us that while many DVS  
19 officials mean well, they frequently are not  
20 receptive to their professional opinions in  
21 addressing veterans' issues. Allowing the status quo  
22 where DVS shuts out the very advocates that helped  
23 create the department lends itself to a loss of trust  
24 and missed opportunities in serving the veterans.  
25 This disconnect is further evident within DVS'

Veterans Advisory Board, the VAB. According to the DVS' own website, the purpose of the VAB is to hold regular meetings, and through these meetings New York City veterans ensure the lines of communications are maintained and cultivate an active community. Yes, in these meetings that our own staff have attended, it is obvious that the VAB meetings are conducted with little direction and have produced minimal value. Another concern of ours is the issue of the DVS salaries. Specifically, our viewpoint that some of those salaries are excessive. Within the budget—within its budget, DVS has one-third of its employees making over \$100,000 annually, placing these staffers in one of the top earning 11% of the New York city government employees. This is on top of the fact that the commissioner who leads DVS is the second highest paid special assistant that Mayor de Blasio has appointed. We fought hard for DVS to be established, and well funded. IAVA has also fought hard against a proposed decrease of \$317,000 of the budget earlier this year. However, IAVA and our allies fought for those funds so they can be utilized to serve New York City veterans, not improperly enrich the city officials. For the sake of our veterans and

2 taxpayers, we encourage the committee to look into  
3 this. This issue of the excessive salaries is  
4 further compounded when placed together with actual  
5 programs and outcomes that the DVS has produced,  
6 which are not impressive. A prime example of this is  
7 the Theater of War productions, which is being  
8 managed by both DVS and the City's Department of  
9 Cultural Affairs. According to the DVS website, TOW  
10 (sic) DVS and DCLA will implement a two-year social  
11 impact project with and for veterans in their  
12 communities across New York City. [ringing phone]  
13 The project uses theater and a variety of other media  
14 to help communities discuss and it directs public  
15 health and social issues. While well meaning, IAVA  
16 sees such a project as having little value to our  
17 veterans in the city as a whole, especially when too  
18 many city veterans will still struggle with issues  
19 regarding housing, education, employment and mental  
20 health. Programs of artistic expression for veterans  
21 are a nice adjunct as long as they are not a drain on  
22 the time and resources of the DVS, and while the \$1.4  
23 million budget being used to fund this project comes  
24 from philanthropic funds, it is our view that the  
25 taxpayer funded shepherding of this project by DVS is

2 money and time that could be more effectively used to  
3 help veterans in their everyday lives. Thus, it is  
4 our view that DVS is shepherding of this program  
5 should be suspended or drawn down. Fundamentally, we  
6 must be committed to adequately addressing the  
7 challenges that New York City veterans face, not  
8 covering them up with hollow and unneeded displays of  
9 support. IAVA is a data driven organization, and as  
10 such, we have always advocated that metrics be  
11 applied in assessing veteran outcomes so that they  
12 can provide the best outcomes to those veterans being  
13 served. We are sure if that is asked, DVS  
14 supervisors could provide a wide range of their  
15 agency-agency's accomplishments, but without  
16 organizational metrics to access them as concrete  
17 outcomes, it creates an image that is dubious at  
18 best, and deceitful at worst. Examples of some of  
19 our metric related recommendations, as they relate to  
20 veterans on the national level can be studied in  
21 depth within IAVA's policy agenda including setting  
22 outcome metrics to better define the impact of  
23 treatment methods for invisible wounds such as PTSD  
24 or major depression, streamline and focus the  
25 Veterans Health Administration organizational

2 performance measures and establish the same in  
3 personnel performance and measuring systems. Require  
4 schools that receive GI Bill funds to report on the  
5 progress of student veterans to include data  
6 collection to provide oversight of school performance  
7 and student successes. These are metrics that can  
8 and should be applied towards DVS programs. IAVA  
9 itself has applied metrics as a service standard to  
10 our rapid response referral program, which is staffed  
11 by our own team of masters level veteran transition  
12 managers. Case managers who insist veterans  
13 worldwide in confronting significant challenges like  
14 unemployment, financial or legal struggles,  
15 homelessness, and mental health related issues. We  
16 do this by sending surveys every single we make a  
17 referral and when the cases are closed. The client  
18 is able to rate every referral we make on quality,  
19 timeliness, effectiveness, and customer service at  
20 each one of our referral partners. We also provide  
21 the opportunity for the clients to grade our own  
22 staff members as well as the case managers that  
23 they're working with using the same metrics once the  
24 case is close. (coughs) At IAVA we believe in  
25 candor, and by providing the veterans we serve that

2 opportunity to grade our own services and provide  
3 feedback this way has enabled us to make continuous  
4 improvements to our own program. In fact, we are  
5 currently in the process of adding even more metrics  
6 to our assessments in order to better understand our  
7 population, better serve our clients, and make  
8 targeted improvements. Lastly, IAVA is concerned  
9 that the Vet Connect New York City program has not  
10 been provided all the tools it need in order to  
11 fulfill its mission of providing a digital  
12 infrastructure for veterans to gain citywide access  
13 to benefits, assistance and resources. Our team's  
14 interactions with the Vet Connect New York City, we  
15 have found them to be very responsive and well  
16 meaning, but have had challenges integrating both of  
17 our systems in serving the city veterans. One of the  
18 challenges is a burdensome increase in the amount of  
19 digital paperwork needed to sync the work of our work  
20 team and that of Vet Connect New York City. Last  
21 year, Vet Connect was budgeted \$116,000. Since then,  
22 they have substantially increased their funding for  
23 FY18 up to over \$884,000. As Vet Connect continues  
24 to find its footing as a platform, we encourage this  
25 committee to provide them with the oversight and

2 tools that they need to be a successful program.  
3 Given the challenges that veterans encounter when  
4 transitioning from military to civilian life, it is  
5 absolutely critical that this committee conduct  
6 proper oversight of the department. Doing so, does  
7 right by the men and women who have sacrificed to  
8 serve this national Members of this committee, I  
9 thank you again for the opportunity to share IAVA's  
10 views on the issues today.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you very much,  
12 Mr. Pike. (coughs) And again, I'm—I'm just going to  
13 reiterate the topic of Vet Connect will definitely be  
14 a main focus at the Preliminary Budget hearings, and  
15 we will be asking many questions of the department as  
16 to, you know, the associated costs and the cause for  
17 delay and whatever other issues, which we know are,  
18 which we know are there, but hopefully-- We are  
19 looking forward to it being rolled out soon, and I'm  
20 pretty optimistic it will be a good thing. I may  
21 have one question, but I'll save it for after Mr.  
22 Korematsu's testimony. So, Mr. Korematsu at your  
23 leisure please.

24 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: [off mic] Hi, we are  
25 here--

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Push  
3 the button if you can. There's button there.

4 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: [on mic] Hi. We met  
5 previously. I'm a New York City veteran, and it's  
6 going to hard to follow what he just said. In fact,  
7 he could be my spokesman-spokesperson for all intents  
8 and purposes. It kind of leads me to be curious as  
9 to whether DVS shares some of the some personnel as  
10 HRA that you and I previously discussed for a variety  
11 of reasons. I gave you some documents to look over  
12 when you have time. Today's there's been some  
13 discussion about how well veterans have been served  
14 in terms of the homelessness issue. There's been  
15 some testimony, and that remains (sic), but let me  
16 cut to the chase. I've applied more than 20 jobs-  
17 more than 20 times with city agencies for jobs, and  
18 they have made statements on Veterans Day last year,  
19 in which he fraudulently claimed to have the backs of  
20 veterans. The reason why I say he fraudulently made  
21 that claim is because after making those 20  
22 applications to city agencies for which he has  
23 control over, not once was I granted an interview,  
24 and I'm fully qualified for each and every one of  
25 those 20 applications. So, how did he reconcile the

2 applications 20 times with jobs I'm fully qualified  
3 for and never once got an interview? The first  
4 remark he made on the date or the first pertinent  
5 remark was anyone who has a job that they're looking  
6 to fill, fill it with a veteran. Do something for  
7 your country. The second remark: When you hire a  
8 veteran I guarantee you, you will not only be doing  
9 the right thing, you will be doing yourself a favor  
10 because they're that good. With regards to this  
11 point there was actually a meeting I believe back in  
12 July where the Controller and Public Advocate  
13 maintained in their offices. There were a group of  
14 veterans sitting in the room talking about how hard  
15 it is to find jobs with the city despite the fact  
16 that we're supposed to be granted a preference for  
17 civil service jobs. So, if it is the case that we're  
18 supposed to be granted a preference, then why is it  
19 that we're not being granted interviews, and, in  
20 fact, if there are positions—positions that we've  
21 held in the private sector previously, and we then  
22 try to find employment with those same types of  
23 positions in the public sector, you know, why can't  
24 we be granted an interview and have a decision made  
25 on the merits as to whether to hire us for that

1 position. Earlier today, there was also a meeting in  
2 front of City Hall with the Public Advocate about  
3 trying to have firms that do business for the city  
4 not subject workers to forced arbitration. I brought  
5 it to the attention of the Commissioner of HRA that  
6 unfortunately I'm still a victim of wage theft that  
7 dates back five years. One of their vendors is the  
8 same company that retaliated against me five years  
9 ago when I blew the whistle about the fact that they  
10 were illegally withholding overtime payment from me.  
11 So, I submitted a FOIL request to HRA that uncovered  
12 the fact that the same Chris A-Hole who had me fired  
13 five years ago signed that same business letter with  
14 HRA. So, the question becomes should taxpayers  
15 really be footing the bill to support a company that  
16 stole my pay five years—five years ago for which  
17 there have been severe repercussions, and that still  
18 persists. The Mayor has also been having public town  
19 hall meetings are subject to New York State's Open  
20 Meetings Law. In spite of the fact that the New York  
21 State Open Meetings Law exists, there the Supreme  
22 Court decision pertaining to viewpoint discrimination  
23 meeting. If you are the mayor and I'm a protestor,  
24 if I disagree with your positions and I want to call  
25

2 you out about the fact that you made frivolous  
3 claims. If I'm not being allowed into those public  
4 meetings that are financed by taxpayers, then who in  
5 this room can have my back in—in support of the same  
6 oath we all took when we joined the military to  
7 protect to defend and the Constitution for all  
8 enemies both foreign and domestic? So, meaning if  
9 the Mayor previously said on March 15<sup>th</sup> at a town  
10 hall in Chelsea that he's interested in learning  
11 about wage fraud and corruption. If I'm a whistle  
12 blower and I can blow the whistle, if I can  
13 substantiate those claims, and despite that, I can't  
14 walk into the same room as other members of the  
15 public to save their cash, isn't there something  
16 seriously wrong about that. And with regards to the  
17 documents to the documents I gave you, I had a job  
18 interview scheduled on August 18<sup>th</sup>, of last year.  
19 The only reason I didn't perform well is I took 15  
20 punches to my left temple on July 2<sup>nd</sup> of last year,  
21 was diagnosed with a concussion on July 30<sup>th</sup> of last  
22 year. HRA was put on notice on March 16<sup>th</sup> of last  
23 year that their business partner Urban Pathways  
24 committed a bait and—bait and switch fraud upon me  
25 and other tenants in the same housing for military

2 veterans in the Bronx, meaning that on one day we  
3 signed one lease agreement. After we signed that  
4 lease agreement that is fully enforceable, Urban  
5 Pathways took upon themselves to materially change  
6 the terms of that lease agreement such I had a  
7 mentally unstable roommate thrust upon my hands who  
8 tried—assaulted me on May 12<sup>th</sup> and was physically  
9 restrained on that date from being able to do so.  
10 However, when there wasn't a security worker in the  
11 apartment, he was able to take his fist, and pummel  
12 my left temple more than 15 times. So, if anyone  
13 else were in that predicament being diagnosed with a  
14 concussion, having severe impact—impact, your  
15 cognitive skills three weeks you walk into the room  
16 with BMP Paredes (sp?) where you could receive a  
17 daily pay of \$450 per day. Yeah that is a major  
18 problem, and the thing is, since then HRA has been  
19 consistently sending me notices in the mail asking me  
20 if I'm interested in earning \$12.14 per hour. So,  
21 how do you compare \$12.14 per hour for a clerical  
22 position to having the opportunity to be compensated  
23 in accordance with what you've earned previously at  
24 the tune of \$450 per day? So when we talk about this  
25 issue of excessive compensation with people who work

2 for the city-city government agencies, I think that's  
3 pretty permanent, isn't it? And I guess the last  
4 question I really have for you-or let me just take a  
5 look at my notes here. Oh, yeah, so there was a-a  
6 time in July this year in Kew Gardens when I had the  
7 pesticides to meet with DVS representatives. Mr. de  
8 Blasio was there. I met with him. Mr. Banks was  
9 standing to his side. I specifically confronted him  
10 about the fact that I applied-like I said, more than  
11 20 times for jobs with the city. His answer to me  
12 was that it's a process to be granted an interview, a  
13 process. So, again, if I'm supposed to be granted  
14 preferential consideration for civil service jobs,  
15 and instead of granting me an interview for jobs that  
16 would be compat-commensurate with my experience and  
17 compensation history, I'm instead being sent notices  
18 by HRA to earn only \$12.14 an hour, how seriously  
19 messed up is that, and can you guys do something to  
20 interceded on my behalf, I guess?

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, I'm not going  
22 to address every single item that you raised today,  
23 but I will say this: The veterans points you  
24 received on a civil service exam apply to the test,  
25 the civil service exam, and you know and mentioned.

2 It is not a guarantee of a job offer but simply  
3 additional points that would give you sort of an  
4 advantage over someone like me who is not a veteran,  
5 for instance. Okay. So, to compare the three points  
6 that you get on a civil service exam with a—a  
7 preference or non-preference of veteran hiring for an  
8 appointed position is really apples and oranges.  
9 They are not the same. A civil service position is—  
10 is different than an appointed city position. Like  
11 the members of my staff are not civil servants. They  
12 don't belong to a union. They don't get points. The  
13 only points they get if they do a good job and  
14 they're nice to me and I want to give them points.  
15 So, my point is that the civil service positions and  
16 civil servants are different than other city  
17 employees. They're all plaid the same way, but  
18 different mechanisms for how they're hired and the  
19 type of preferences that they receive. I don't know  
20 the 20 jobs that you applied for to be fair. I'm  
21 sure—I—I know you have them. I know. I'm saying but  
22 off the top of my head I don't know what they are  
23 exactly. I would argue, though, that you have said  
24 you met with DVS, right, on the--

2 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Probably, I think.

3 (sic)

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, and the most  
5 recently over the summer, that they probably put you  
6 in touch with somebody at SBS, right? Is that—you  
7 did. Okay, well they—they might have referred your  
8 information to SBS, and that's probably why you got  
9 that letter or that offer in the mail for \$12.14, and  
10 well, is—is that the correct chronology of the—the  
11 events here? I mean that's--

12 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: I was receiving those  
13 notices before meeting with them.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, so you  
15 received these notices. For the 20 jobs that you  
16 applied for, I mean you have the folder? Do you have  
17 the file? [background comment] It's across the  
18 street. Okay. I don't know what those positions  
19 are, but I have—because I fund city agencies, and I  
20 have oversight over city agencies, it will be a  
21 conflict of interest for me to call the Commissioner  
22 and say hey, hire this guy. Now, I could give you a  
23 character reference. I could say I know this person.  
24 He's a hard working, intelligent, honest individual,  
25 and I think he would be an asset to the company or to

2 the agency. But I am not able to legally pressure a  
3 city agency to hire or not hire somebody. I mean  
4 that—that would be over-stepping my bounds legally,  
5 yes.

6 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But it's not that  
7 issue. It's the issue of simply being granted and  
8 interview, and then from that interview make a  
9 decision on the basis is this person to sweat. I'm  
10 not even being granted an interview.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, so we can look  
12 into this. I'll talk to DVS on the side about this  
13 particular issues, as to why you're not being called  
14 in for an interview. There is a part of SBS where  
15 they help veterans, connect them to jobs that are  
16 commensurate with their experience, and I am of the  
17 opinion that the city should be everything it can to  
18 get veterans good paying jobs. Nobody is opposed to  
19 that, but maybe the jobs that you have applied for  
20 are not the best fit for you, and maybe there are  
21 others that they can help connect you with.

22 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But if they are the  
23 best fit for me, then I guess what would the answer  
24 be?

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You're not entitled  
3 to an interview is what I'm trying to say, and-and  
4 okay. So, just like I'm not. I can apply to be the  
5 Commissioner of baseball. They're not going to give  
6 me-and I would love to be interviewed for the job,  
7 but I'm not entitled to it. You know, I could have  
8 the best-I could know all that stats, I could know  
9 all that-I could go to every game, I could be the  
10 biggest fan. I mean like, you know, I could know  
11 people that work there, but I am not-just because I  
12 apply for something doesn't mean that I'm entitled to  
13 an interview, but-but we could find out why perhaps  
14 you weren't called for an interview and try to  
15 connect you with a job where you can be interviewed  
16 for it. That'-that's-that is the best solution. I  
17 don't want you to take this personally. I want you  
18 to also understand this, Mr. Korematsu, there are  
19 thousands and thousands and thousands of people that  
20 apply for city jobs every single day, and in every  
21 agency, and even though you have a stellar military  
22 service record, which I'm sure you do. Okay, your  
23 one application, your one resume is likely to be one  
24 of hundreds if not thousands of applications also for  
25 people that many of whom are not qualified the

2 position, did not serve in the military, but the  
3 still have to go through all of those applications to  
4 pull out the ones that are., and then at the period  
5 when the posting is-is being taken down, they can  
6 call people in for-for interviews. I don't want you  
7 to believe that you have been discriminated against  
8 in any way in the hiring practices of the city of New  
9 York because we hire lots of people in the city who  
10 are not qualified for positions and they somehow get  
11 jobs including some people on the City Council. So,  
12 I blame it on--

13 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: That's unfortunately  
14 where you're wrong, because if the Mayor is having  
15 these public meetings, and if I have a First  
16 Amendment Right to walk through this or to engage in  
17 networking, the members of the public that have the  
18 opportunity to decide is he really representing the  
19 interest of New Yorkers best or is there someone else  
20 perhaps?

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, dude, okay,  
22 you want to go to these meetings to--

23 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: [interposing] To  
24 network.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --ask a question or  
3 just to be a member of the audience?

4 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: To-to ask questions.  
5 Essentially say these are your remarks on Veterans  
6 Day last year. How do you reconcile our own remarks  
7 with the fact that I can't be granted an interview?

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's a very fair  
9 question, and you have a right to ask it, and you  
10 have a right to attend the meeting. I don't believe  
11 that the Mayor's Office has put a restraining order  
12 on you in any way.

13 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Well, he kept me out  
14 of these meetings illegally--

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay.

16 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: --repeatedly on  
17 different dates, different occasions.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well then that's--  
19 that's your right. I would never interfere with your  
20 First Amendment Rights, and you have--

21 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But as a Council  
22 Member is there anything that you can do, I guess  
23 escalate this to the attention of DOI or the Police  
24 Commissioner who would have authority to see to it  
25 that laws are being complied with?

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We should have a  
3 conversation with DVS and the Mayor's Office of CAU,  
4 the Community Affairs Unit because they are the ones  
5 that coordinate these events and these meetings.

6 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: I've tried to meet  
7 them at these events, and they have blown me off.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, well, then  
9 that's not fair. So we—we'll have a conversation  
10 with them about the next one, and Jamal is raising  
11 his hand from DVS so--

12 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But the—the Mayor has  
13 public meeting tonight and another one tomorrow.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Listen, the Mayor  
15 doesn't take my questions any more either. Don't  
16 take it personally, and I don't know what to tell  
17 you. Maybe because I've been attacking him for the  
18 past year and a half, but the—the point is that I—I  
19 don't want you to take any of these things  
20 personally. They—they—this isn't the City of New  
21 York versus Mr. Korematsu. I don't want you to feel  
22 that way at all. The fact that you are—this is an  
23 open public meeting. You are here. You are asking  
24 questions. You are getting face time with a policy

2 maker and senior administration officials. So nobody  
3 is trying to shut you out of--of the--

4 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: [interposing] One  
5 final question.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

7 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Do you have the  
8 ability to subpoena the Commissioners of HRA to have  
9 them answer your questions under oath?

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Me personally no,  
11 but the Chair of that committee does. Legally, yes,  
12 we have--

13 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Which committee is  
14 that?

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The--

16 FEMALE SPEAKER: General Welfare.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: General Welfare.  
18 Thank you. The Committee on General Welfare, and  
19 that's Council Member Levin.

20 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: So, if he's lying  
21 under oath when he testifies, what recourse is  
22 available--

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing]  
24 There's lots of lying that goes on in this building.  
25 This is--it's unfortunate but--

2 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But if he's sworn when  
3 he's making those statements, they should be--

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Well,  
5 that's correct, but look that's a very valid point.  
6 You have a number of issues that we have to work  
7 through. The first is if you want a job, I can help  
8 you, point you in the right direction, and I think  
9 DVS is committed to doing the same. I can assure  
10 that I would never—I have control over this meeting  
11 and this side of City Hall, and I would never keep  
12 anyone away, and I've had some real interesting  
13 people come to my hearings, and you know, what, every  
14 opinion counts. Everything is valid. I don't  
15 dismiss anybody. I try not to be rude. I let people  
16 air their grievances whatever issue they're having,  
17 and we try to take people from where they're coming  
18 from.

19 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: And I just--

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] I—I  
21 want you know that in this room and in this place,  
22 you are being heard right now.

23 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: And just one final  
24 question. I'll keep it short.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Of course, that's  
3 fine. I'm not--

4 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Is there any pressure  
5 that you can put on city agencies to cancel their  
6 contracts with the same company that stole my pay?

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, I think the  
8 pressure that can be brought to bear is the--is during  
9 the oversight hearings, particularly during budget  
10 time when we can ask very specific questions about  
11 programs, initiatives and how agencies are spending  
12 money. The other way that is very helpful and it's  
13 very helpful to me is the press. When the media  
14 reports mismanagement or--or some sort of mishandling  
15 of taxpayer funding by a particular agency, and we  
16 saw this with DHS with some of conditions in the  
17 shelter system. We had a big hearing and the Daily  
18 News ran a big expose, and I--I heard that things  
19 dramatically improved thereafter so--

20 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: They're doing my  
21 story.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I beg your pardon?

23 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: I talked to reporters  
24 for both the New York Post and the Daily News. They

2 told me they were going to publish the story.

3 (coughs) It didn't appear.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, I think you  
5 should talk to more reports is what I'm trying to  
6 say.

7 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Okay.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Is that the--the  
9 press is very helpful, and there's no shortage of  
10 reporters in the city who want to embarrass the city.  
11 So, I would encourage you to continue that in the  
12 pursuit of--of justice that--that you have. I have  
13 encouraged you in the past, and I will again, to try  
14 to get some type of legal representation.

15 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But they refuse.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: NYLAG refused. Legal  
17 Services NYC, they were not helpful. Okay. So, we'll  
18 have another conversation with--

19 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: I mean I appreciate  
20 assistance.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I really--I want you  
22 to know that me and my staff and the people that work  
23 for the City Council you're a veteran and you matter,  
24 and your opinion counts for something, and whatever I  
25 could do to help, I will do to help. I will never

2 slam the door in your face. I don't ever want you to  
3 feel like you're wasting your time.

4 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But can you come with  
5 me to the Town Hall meeting tomorrow night and see  
6 I'm able to offer you a front seat. (sic)

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: What—I don't know.  
8 What—what—what would--?

9 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Okay, Wednesday night  
10 in the Bronx, Ritchie Torres' Town Hall.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, let me ask you  
12 this question. Are you Bronx—it may be only open to  
13 Bronx residents. Are you a Bronx resident?

14 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh, okay. Well,  
16 you're a Bronx resident. The Mayor is going to a  
17 public meeting in the Bronx?

18 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Are you going to  
20 blow the place up or do anything crazy? No. Okay,  
21 God willing so--

22 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: No, that is head of  
23 security who is a defendant in a civil rights lawsuit  
24 is among the people that won't let me into the  
25 building.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, so if you're  
3 not threatening to be disruptive in any way, you're  
4 nog to be a--?

5 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: But the people who  
6 were just kicked out of the town hall meeting last  
7 Friday made the New York Post in Harlem.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay.

9 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: So, if he's treating  
10 other people to--

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Well,  
12 I think maybe that's--maybe you, you know, maybe that  
13 you want to bring a reporter with you, and if they  
14 don't allow you access, that's when the story goes in  
15 the paper, the next day. The Post would love a story  
16 like that.

17 TOWAKI KOREMATSU: Yeah.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think that they  
19 like any story that sells papers. So, my point is  
20 this: Let's see if we could be helpful off line and  
21 Jamal will have a little conversation, the three of  
22 us. That concludes today's hearing. I want to thank  
23 everyone for coming, the Administration for their  
24 testimony today, and do we have a date for the next  
25 hearing? Do we have a date yet?

2 FEMALE SPEAKER: Not yet.

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Not yet, but we will  
4 announce that hopefully soon. The meeting is  
5 adjourned. [gavel]

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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 October 10, 2017