

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 1

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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April 4, 2022
Start: 1:11 p.m.
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HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING - VIRTUAL ROOM 1

B E F O R E: Robert F. Holden, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
Sandy Nurse
Vickie Paladino
Diana Ayala
Tiffany Caban
Crystal Hudson
Linda Lee
Chi A. Osse
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams
Eric Dinowitz
Gale A. Brewer

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL WELFARE

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

Jason Loughran, Assistant Commissioner, DVS
Dana Rock, Director of Housing, DVS
Iris Rodriguez, Deputy Commissioner of Adult
Services at DSS
Sonya Russell, Assistant Commissioner of Adult
Families, Veterans, and Special Services
Anddy Perdomo
Adam Wzurynek
Kevin Meggett
Wendy McClinton
Deborah Berkman
Coco Culhane
Towaki Komatsu

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL WELFARE

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2 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: PC recording is
3 started.

4 SERGEANT POLITE: Recording to the cloud
5 all set.

6 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: Thank you, and good
7 afternoon. Welcome to today's remote New York City
8 Council hearing of the Committee on Veterans jointly
9 with General Welfare.

10 At this time, would all Council Members
11 and staff please turn on their video?

12 To minimize disruption, please place
13 electronic devices on vibrate or silent mode.

14 If you wish to submit testimony, you may
15 do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that
16 is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

17 Thank you for your cooperation. We are
18 ready to begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [GAVEL] Good
20 afternoon. I am Council Member Robert Holden, Chair
21 of the New York City Council's Committee on Veterans,
22 and I want to thank all of you for attending this
23 important joint hearing with the General Welfare
24 Committee on the City's efforts to end veterans'
25 homelessness.

2 During the 1970s, my generation saw the
3 end result of a city and a country that neglected our
4 veterans. Rampant homelessness and drug use plagued
5 the veteran community. We've come a long way since
6 the Vietnam War in how we treat veterans.

7 Nevertheless, the transition from military life to
8 civilian life remains challenging even for the post-
9 9/11 veterans' generation. We are here today to
10 better understand which programs and services are
11 succeeding in helping veterans and in what areas we
12 can do better. Last week, I visited the Borden Avenue
13 Veterans Shelter in Long Island City, and I can tell
14 you the staff is very committed to the wellbeing of
15 homeless veterans. However, they need more resources
16 and attention from city agencies. The food situation
17 for our veterans has deteriorated significantly. I
18 brought some food back to show you here today, and
19 I'll do that in a few minutes, but it's not much for
20 an adult man to eat and from what every single
21 veteran that I spoke to says the food tastes worse
22 than it looks. For veterans who are suffering from
23 depression, unemployment, and substance abuse, having
24 a good meal can go a long way towards having a
25 positive day. It can affect a veteran's attitude on

2 job interviews and housing appointments. It's not
3 just about the taste and nutritional value, but the
4 positive mental attitude a good meal can create. My
5 office is going to work with not-for-profits and the
6 nonprofits and city agencies to improve the food
7 situation at the Borden Avenue Shelter.

8 While visiting the Shelter, I also saw a
9 better model on how shelters can be structured. Many
10 veterans are not in an open area but rather have an
11 open-air room with a door that remains unlocked. It
12 creates a level of privacy that is preferred by
13 veterans. It's like a modular unit. After speaking
14 with veterans at the shelter, having this privacy
15 helps maintain their dignity and fosters a more
16 positive environment. It's a model DHS should look at
17 for all homeless individuals.

18 In addition to our oversight topic, we'll
19 also be hearing Resolution 21-2022 sponsored by
20 Council Member Dinowitz reaffirming New York City's
21 status as a Purple Heart City and calling on the
22 state legislature to pass and the Governor to sign
23 legislation designating the state of New York a
24 Purple Heart State.

2 We'll also be hearing Resolution 41-2022
3 calling on Congress to pass and the President to sign
4 legislation that allows service members, veterans,
5 and eligible surviving spouses to use the Department
6 of Veterans home loans to purchase a co-op apartment,
7 which is long overdue. In December 2015, the
8 Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, and
9 the Department of Veterans Affairs notified New York
10 City that it had effectively chronic homelessness
11 among veterans signifying that all known chronically
12 homeless veterans had either been housed or were on
13 an immediate path to permanent housing. In 2016, HUD
14 found that there were 527 sheltered homeless veterans
15 and 32 unhoused veterans, a 66 percent reduction from
16 3 years earlier. The de Blasio administration credits
17 this reduction with the city's focused efforts to
18 identify and track all homeless veterans, expanding
19 affordable housing stock, connecting veterans with
20 voucher programs, and implementing incentives for
21 brokers and landlords to rent to veterans. While this
22 is a landmark achievement, our work is not done.

23 According to the latest DHS figures, in
24 January 2022 there were 203 persons residing in our
25 city's veterans' shelters. However, total veteran

2 count remains much higher because many of our city's
3 veterans are not living in a dedicated veterans'
4 shelter or unhoused altogether. We also have an
5 unknown number of veterans who are at risk for
6 homelessness. Veterans who have substance abuse
7 issues, veterans who are in danger of being evicted
8 due to an inability to pay rent, and veterans that
9 are not captured in the point in time count. Today,
10 my aim is to investigate how we can expand successful
11 programs like the Veterans Peer Coordinator
12 Initiative, build on federal partnership of the HUD-
13 VASH voucher program, and extend outreach and
14 preventative services to those at risk of
15 homelessness.

16 I believe outreach is an essential
17 component to resolving this crisis. DVS and DHS
18 services must be accessible to all veterans. I'm
19 concerned that DVS virtual platforms deter our senior
20 veterans from getting the help that they desperately
21 need and the DVS is not adequately staffed to fund or
22 meet this challenge. Our veterans deserve quality
23 case management from trained staff professionals to
24 help them navigate federal and local bureaucracies.

2 I look forward to working with DVS to
3 ensure that the agency has the resources it needs to
4 help our most vulnerable veterans.

5 I want to thank the Veterans Committee
6 staff for their help in putting this hearing
7 together, Committee Counsel Bianca Vitale, Policy
8 Analyst Elizabeth Arzt, and Senior Finance Analyst
9 Sebastian Bacchi as well as my staff, Chief of Staff
10 Daniel Kurzyna and the Legislative Director Craig
11 Caruana.

12 I want to turn it over to my Colleague
13 and good friend, Deputy Speak Diana Ayala, Chair of
14 the City Council's General Welfare Committee to
15 deliver her opening statement.

16 I'm joined by fellow Council Members
17 Brewer, Dinowitz, Osse, Paladino, Stevens, Hudson,
18 Nurse, Ariola, Riley, Ung, Restler, Lee, and
19 Williams.

20 Over to you, Chair Ayala.

21 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Thank you, Chair
22 Holden. Good afternoon and welcome. I am Deputy
23 Speaker Diana Ayala, Chair of the Council's Committee
24 on General Welfare.

2 Today, I am joining my Colleague, Council
3 Member Holden, to hold a hearing on veteran
4 homelessness in New York City. It is undeniable that
5 we are still in the midst of a homeless crisis in
6 this city, one that has been further exacerbated by
7 the COVID-19 pandemic. We have an obligation to
8 protect the most vulnerable New Yorkers and to
9 prevent homelessness from happening to begin with,
10 including among our veteran population. Many veterans
11 in New York City are considered at risk of
12 homelessness because of poverty, lack of support from
13 family or friends, substance use or mental health
14 issues, and vicarious living conditions. Veterans
15 experience high rates of post-traumatic stress
16 disorder, traumatic brain injury, and sexual trauma,
17 all of which can lead to higher risk of homelessness.
18 According to recent estimates, on a single night in
19 January of 2019, the number of veterans experiencing
20 homelessness in New York State was 1,270. Of that
21 total, an estimated 684 were in New York City. More
22 than 90 percent of veterans experiencing homelessness
23 identified as male, 8.7 percent identified as female,
24 and 0.03 percent identified as transgender.

2 In addition to living in shelters, many
3 veterans live on our streets. I would like to
4 understand better what the Department of Homeless
5 Services is doing to support veterans experiencing
6 homelessness on the street from the very first point
7 of contact at outreach. We will be having a special
8 hearing on unsheltered homelessness in New York City
9 at the end of this month, but I want to underscore
10 the streets are both inhumane and ineffective. We
11 must do better for New Yorkers experiencing
12 homelessness.

13 I am also interested in learning what the
14 city is doing to provide wraparound services to
15 veterans who may be experiencing mental health issues
16 or substance abuse and what the city is doing to
17 provide meaningful pathways to permanent housing for
18 veterans. Housing is a human right. We need to make
19 sure that we are taking a multiprong approach to
20 ensure that every New Yorker has access to safe,
21 permanent, and affordable housing.

22 Thank you to the advocates, members of
23 the public, and those with lived experience who are
24 with us today.

2 Thank you to representatives from the
3 administration for joining us. I look forward to
4 hearing from you all on these critical issues.

5 In addition to the Veterans Committee, I
6 would like to thank my Committee staff who work to
7 prepare this hearing. Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel;
8 Crystal Pond, Senior Policy Analyst; Julia Haramis,
9 Finance Analyst; Rose Martinez, Senior Data
10 Scientist; Ben Witt, Data Scientist; and my Deputy
11 Chief of Staff Michelle Cruz.

12 Thanks, again, Council Member Holden. I'd
13 also like to recognize that we have been joined by
14 Members of the General Welfare Committee, Council
15 Members Riley, Stevens, Ung, Lee, Williams, Restler,
16 Hudson, and Osse. Back to you, Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair
18 Ayala.

19 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Sorry. Council
20 Member Caban.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, I was about to
22 mention. Thanks so much for that. I will now turn it
23 over to Council Member Dinowitz to deliver remarks on
24 the resolution he is sponsoring.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
3 Chair. I very much appreciate you giving me the time
4 to speak on Resolution 21-2022. I actually had the
5 honor to serve as Chair on this very Committee last
6 year, and it was very humbling to engage with so many
7 of our veterans.

8 Resolution 21 will honor a specific group
9 of our veterans, the veterans who have earned the
10 Purple Heart. These veterans have been wounded or
11 have been killed so that the rest of us can live in
12 relative peace and comfort.

13 In 2018, the City Council actually
14 declared New York City a Purple Heart City so this
15 resolution not only reaffirms that commitment to our
16 veterans who have earned the Purple Heart, but it
17 also calls on the state legislature to pass and the
18 Governor to sign Senate Bill 2279 and Assembly Bill
19 7961 to make New York State a Purple Heart State. It
20 is very important that we honor our heroes with this
21 designation. It signifies that New York City is
22 welcoming, appreciative, and indebted to our veterans
23 who were wounded or killed keeping the rest of us
24 safe, and it is time the entirety of our state
25 recognizes that sacrifice which is why I introduced

2 this resolution and why I am asking my fellow Council
3 Members to support and sign onto Resolution 21.

4 I just want to, again, thank Chair Holden
5 and Chair Ayala and, of course the Committee Staff,
6 Bianca Vitale and Elizabeth Arzt, for their
7 incredible work on this resolution. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Council
9 Member Dinowitz. I'll now turn it over to Senior
10 Counsel for the General Welfare Committee, Aminta
11 Kilawan, to go over some procedural matters for this
12 hearing.

13 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
14 Holden and Chair Ayala and Council Member Dinowitz. I
15 am Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel for the Committee
16 on General Welfare of the New York City Council. I
17 will be moderating today's hearing.

18 Before we begin, I want to go over a few
19 procedural matters. I will be calling on panelists to
20 testify. I want to remind everyone that you will be
21 on mute until you are called and then you will be
22 unmuted by the host. Please listen for your name to
23 be called.

24 For everyone testifying today, please
25 note that there may be a few seconds of delay before

2 you are unmuted, and we thank you for your patience
3 with that.

4 At today's hearing, the first panel will
5 be comprised of members of the administration
6 followed by Council Member questions and then members
7 of the public will testify.

8 During the hearing, if Council Members
9 would like to ask a question, please use the Zoom
10 raise hand function, and you will be upon in order of
11 when you raised your hand.

12 I will now call on members of the
13 administration to testify. DVS Assistant Commissioner
14 Jason Loughran, DVS Director of Housing Dana Rock,
15 Deputy Commissioner of Adult Services at DSS Iris
16 Rodriguez, and Assistant Commissioner of Adult
17 Families, Veterans, and Special Services Sonya
18 Russell.

19 I will first read the oath and after I
20 will call on each panelist representing the
21 administration to individually respond. Do you affirm
22 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
23 the truth before this Committee and to respond
24 honestly to Council Member questions? Assistant
25 Commissioner Loughran.

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2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: I do.

3 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you.

4 Director Rock.

5 DIRECTOR ROCK: I do.

6 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you.

7 Deputy Commissioner Rodriguez.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I do.

9 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you.

10 Finally, Assistant Commissioner Russell.

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: I do.

12 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you.

13 Assistant Commissioner Loughran, you may begin when
14 ready if you're the one who's going to be speaking
15 first for the administration. Otherwise, we can begin
16 with Deputy Commissioner Iris Rodriguez.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: I'll

18 begin today. Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Ayala and
19 Chair Holden, Members of the Committee and advocates.

20 My name is Jason Loughran, and I'm proud to serve as
21 the Assistant Commissioner of Community Affairs for
22 the New York City Department of Veteran Services. I'm
23 joined today by my Colleague, Dana Rock, who is our
24 Director of Housing.

25

3 Thank you for providing us with the
4 opportunity to discuss DVS' efforts in partnership
5 with our sister agencies in addressing veteran
6 homeless. Following my testimony, we welcome any
7 questions that Council Members may have.

8 Veteran homelessness is one of the most
9 critical issues that DVS works on. It has been an
10 essential focus of our work since before our
11 inception as an agency back when our department used
12 to operate as the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs.
13 In June 2014, former First Lady Michelle Obama
14 announced the federal government's mayoral challenge
15 to veteran homelessness, an effort that the City of
16 New York became actively involved in. Since accepting
17 the challenge 8 years ago, DVS has made remarkable
18 progress in significantly reducing veteran
19 homelessness.

20 In collaboration with the New York City
21 Continuum of Care, veteran-focused nonprofits, and
22 our fellow city agencies, New York City launched
23 Mission Home Veterans, a city-based initiative to end
24 veteran homelessness. New York became the largest
25 city in the country to participate in this
initiative. This effort represented the city's deep

2 commitment to provide the necessary services,
3 support, and housing needed for veterans experiencing
4 homelessness. The growth of this effort also
5 coincided with DVS becoming a full city agency
6 enabling us to serve as a national model for how
7 cities and local government can offer comprehensive
8 and holistic services to veterans.

9 Assisting veterans who are experiencing
10 homelessness is one of the foundational pillars of
11 this agency. Since the start of our housing and
12 support services program in 2016, DVS has assisted a
13 total 1,056 veterans with their moves into permanent
14 or supportive housing. My Colleague, the Department
15 of Homeless Services Deputy Commissioner Iris
16 Rodriguez, will provide you with more extensive
17 details and the services and resources that DHS
18 provides. I will discuss the extensive array of
19 support services that DVS provides to veterans, many
20 of which have been integral to addressing veteran
21 homelessness in a holistic way.

22 The primary DVS staff who work with
23 veterans experiencing homelessness are in the
24 Community Affairs Unit, which make up approximately a
25 third of our agency staff. This unit provides care

2 coordination and assists with critical veteran
3 services such as disability claims. We have 7 seven
4 staff who are specifically dedicated to housing and
5 support services, 5 veteran peer coordinators, also
6 known as a VPC, a veteran housing specialist who is
7 responsible for the recruitment of housing stock, and
8 my Colleague, Dana Rock who serves as their team
9 leader. The majority of our VPCs are veterans
10 themselves, and they work peer-to-peer to build
11 relationships and help clients navigate New York
12 City's complex housing process. The VPCs serve as
13 advocates, ensuring veterans are informed throughout
14 housing process and have everything they need
15 including, but not limited to, providing support to
16 help veterans and their families assess and prepare
17 for viable housing options, advocating on behalf of
18 veterans and their families with landlords and
19 management companies, transportation to and from
20 apartment viewings, housing application assistance,
21 broker and landlord introductions, unit inspection
22 assistance, facilitation of one-shot deal requests,
23 and referrals for furniture.

24 Our goals are to help veterans understand
25 the benefits they are eligible for, ensure the

2 connection to the benefits occurs, and to identify
3 housing opportunities that is an appropriate fit. Our
4 team leverages existing subsidy programs and
5 community resources to match veterans to the right
6 level of care and support they need. Our office
7 leverages programs such as the federally funded HUD-
8 VASH Vouchers administered through the Veterans
9 Administration, Support Services for Veteran
10 Families, SSVFs, city subsidies such as SOTA and
11 CityFHEPS, and various levels of supportive housing
12 to provide our constituency with an array of housing
13 options.

14 HUD-VASH is a collaborative program that
15 pairs HUD's housing voucher program, rental
16 assistance with VA case management and supportive
17 services. These services are designed to help
18 homeless veterans and their families find and sustain
19 permanent housing and access to healthcare, mental
20 health treatment, substance use counseling, and other
21 supports necessary to help them in their recovery
22 process and with their ability to maintain housing in
23 the community.

24 If veterans are ineligible for services
25 through the VA, it can leave many experiencing

2 homelessness without access to housing subsidies or
3 case management. As such, in 2017, DVS piloted a
4 program to fill this critical gap in services for
5 those who are ineligible due to their length of
6 service or type of discharge. The Rental Subsidy HUD-
7 VASH Continuum was created and administered by the
8 New York City Housing Authority, NYCHA, DVS, and our
9 community partners to provide case management along
10 with a housing choice section 8 voucher to this
11 subset of particularly vulnerable clients. This
12 program was piloted with an issue of 100 vouchers and
13 has continued to grow each year. Since the program
14 began, DVS has housed 258 veterans with this specific
15 subsidy. As always, careful and compassionate case
16 management is provided by our Veteran Peer
17 Coordinators.

18 In addition, assistance does not end when
19 a veteran is housed because DVS also provides
20 wraparound aftercare services to ensure our veteran
21 clients remain stably housed. In fact, all veterans
22 housed by DVS have access to VPCs and aftercare
23 followup services to ensure there is a connection to
24 critical services during this time of transition and
25 recovery. Services include check-in calls over the

2 course of 24 months after placement and referrals to
3 community partners who provide mental health,
4 employment, and other support resources.

5 In coordination with DHS, DVS also works
6 for federal grantees known as SSVFs, Support Services
7 for Veteran Families to place our veterans into their
8 new permanent homes. These organizations include HELP
9 USA, Jericho, Services for the Underserved, and
10 Volunteers of America.

11 In addition to providing permanent
12 housing solutions to our homeless veterans, DVS also
13 offers information about affordable housing and home
14 ownership opportunities. I invite the community to
15 visit nyc.gov/vethousing, again, nyc.gov/vethousing,
16 to find a comprehensive resource guide that includes
17 information about utility bill assistance, a list of
18 donation centers that offer clothing and household
19 goods, and an eviction prevention frequently asked
20 questions page to assist veterans who are in danger
21 of eviction. Another key feature on this page is our
22 Housing Ladder, which is a resource that provides
23 access to housing information for veterans at every
24 stage of their housing journey. It includes
25 information about NYCHA, veterans Mitchell-Lama

2 preference, senior housing, the VA home loan, and the
3 veterans property tax exemption.

4 Our agency also advocated at the federal
5 level for the VA home loan to be approved for the
6 purchase of co-op shares. New York City is unique in
7 that much of our housing stock exists within
8 cooperative dwellings, and we believe that purchasing
9 a co-op is an affordable pathway for our veterans to
10 become first-time homebuyers. We strongly support any
11 policies that allow for the VA home loan to be used
12 for this type of lending here in New York City.

13 While our housing members are a measure
14 of our staff's work and dedication, these are
15 individual lives that are impacted that are greatest
16 wins. I would like to share the story of a veteran we
17 housed in October 2020. He is a US Army veteran with
18 an other-than-honorable discharge that we began
19 working with in April 2020. The veteran at the time
20 of intake was struggling with substance abuse, and he
21 ended up leaving shelter to enter a treatment
22 facility to receive help. The VPC remained in contact
23 with him throughout this treatment and, upon his
24 release, DVS was able to secure him a HUD-VASH
25 Continuum voucher. Our VPC assisted the veteran by

2 finding special housing in Queens that also offered
3 on-site social services. The veteran has since been
4 in touch with our aftercare team and, during his 10-
5 month check-in call, we learned that he was
6 recertifying and renewing his lease for another year.

7 Another example of our work includes a
8 referral we received from a shelter partner in July
9 2020 for a 63-year-old Air Force veteran who was
10 requesting help in identifying a rental unit that
11 allowed him to use his HUD-VASH voucher. He was
12 assigned to a VPC to support in his housing search
13 and, subsequently, several apartment viewings were
14 set up for him. He was accepted to a one-bedroom unit
15 in Manhattan and was able to move into his new home
16 in under 90 days from when he first completed intake
17 with our office. We had his 18-month check-in just
18 last week, and he reported how well he was doing in
19 his home. Here is a quote from the letter that this
20 grateful veteran sent to the VPC who helped him. "No
21 sooner had she listened to some of my journey that
22 she referred me to housing options, explained to me
23 the differences in the different programs that at the
24 time seemed to be a maze and mosaic that were
25 confusing, especially while under duress."

3 These are just a few examples of the
4 impact that our staff and community partners have on
5 the lives of the veterans we serve. DVS takes great
6 pride in our efforts to ensure that those who have
7 served our country do not face homelessness and get
8 the assistance and support they need to rebuild and
9 thrive.

10 Housing and support services are just a
11 small piece of the comprehensive care and resources
12 that we offer to our community. When it comes to
13 providing services and referrals, our care
14 coordination team focuses on core areas including,
15 but not limited to, VA disability claims, benefits
16 navigation support, funeral honors, food assistance,
17 and health and wellness referrals. Our claims team
18 has also been accredited by the New York State
19 Division of Veteran Services to process claims
20 related to disability compensation, survivors'
21 pension, indemnity dependency compensation, and
22 education. Since July 2020, DVS has successfully
23 actioned 226 claims submission, the vast majority of
24 which involved a claim of disability. Only 14.9
25 percent of New York City veterans currently receive
disability compensation, and we believe the numbers

2 of those who are eligible may be much higher. Through
3 increased outreach, we are confident that we will
4 connect more New York City veterans including those
5 who are homeless or recently housed to VA
6 Disability compensation.

7 Providing employment training and
8 educational opportunities to all veterans is a vital
9 part of our mission and it is especially critical for
10 veterans experiencing homelessness. One of the main
11 reasons that people end up homeless is a lack of
12 steady income, chronic or prolonged unemployment, and
13 poverty. Some veterans also face the added challenge
14 of having difficulty re-entering the job market after
15 they have returned from service. It is estimated that
16 there are about 20,485 veterans who are unemployed,
17 which represents approximately 13.5 percent of the
18 total New York City veteran population. For
19 comparison, the overall unemployment rate in New York
20 City was approximately 12 percent by the end of
21 fiscal year '20. DVS launched VetConnectPro, a first
22 in the nation employment tool designed to connect
23 veteran job seekers to employment opportunities in
24 the public and private sectors to address this
25 community need. In addition, our care coordinators

2 work with trusted referral partners such as
3 Workforce1 and other community nonprofits to connect
4 our vets with unemployment support that is culturally
5 competent and effective.

6 Last, I would like to bring your
7 attention to a community event that DVS will be
8 participating in with the Fuller Center this summer.
9 This event is called the Furniture Build-A-Thon. DVS
10 and the Fuller Center will team up to recruit
11 volunteers who will help assemble handmade furniture
12 for our recently housed veterans. We are in the
13 process of confirming dates and locations and invite
14 Members of the Committee and advocates present at
15 today's hearing to volunteer with us in this effort.
16 This project is an excellent way to show your
17 support, build community, and give back to our
18 veteran neighbors.

19 In closing, I'd like to thank our veteran
20 clients for continuing to inspire our team with their
21 resilience, selflessness, and compassion that they
22 display throughout our communities. We firmly believe
23 that anyone who has served our nation should never
24 experience homelessness or housing insecurity. Please
25 note that our agency stands ready to support and

2 connect you to the care you rightfully deserve. It is
3 an honor and privilege to serve all of you, and I
4 thank you for allowing me to testify before you
5 today. We are pleased to address any questions you
6 may have.

7 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you,
8 Assistant Commissioner Loughran. Over now to
9 representatives of the Department of Social Services.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Good
11 afternoon. I want to thank the Committee on General
12 Welfare and Veterans and Chairs Ayala and Holden for
13 the opportunity to testify today.

14 My name is Iris Rodriguez, and I am the
15 Deputy Commissioner for Adult Services in the
16 Department of Homeless Services. I am joined by my
17 Colleague here, Sonya Russell, who is the Assistant
18 Commissioner for Adult Family, Veteran, and Special
19 Services along with Jason Loughran, Assistant
20 Commissioner for Community Affairs at the New York
21 City Department of Veteran Services who just spoke.
22 We look forward to updating the Committee today on
23 the work that the Adams' administration and DHS and
24 our partners are doing to support veterans who may be
25 experiencing homelessness.

3 New York City's veterans are individuals
4 who made the brave choice of protecting our nation
5 above all, and it is our collective responsibility to
6 ensure that they are stably housed and connected to
7 the resources they need to thrive. DHS continues to
8 do its part in supporting our veterans, and we're
9 proud of the progress that we and our Colleagues in
10 and out of state government are making in reducing
11 veteran homelessness.

12 From the onset, the Adams' administration
13 and DSS/DHS have made alleviating veteran's
14 homelessness a top priority with the goal of better
15 serving and supporting those who served our nation
16 and who may be experiencing challenges re-entering
17 civilian life.

18 Thanks to the aggressive re-housing
19 efforts in close coordination with the New York City
20 Department of Veteran Services, we have reduced the
21 number of veterans experiencing homelessness in New
22 York City by nearly 70 percent since 2014 when we had
23 1,650 veterans to now 542 in 2021, and we won't rest
24 until every New Yorkers who has served our country in
25 the military has an affordable home to live. Looking
at the population of veterans experiencing

2 homelessness in New York City, as of this month we
3 have 398 in DHS facilities. In addition, 5 that are
4 experiencing unsheltered homelessness. We are pleased
5 to share that from 2014 through 2021 we have placed
6 4,913 veterans into housing, which includes 1,130
7 veterans who have exited shelter through the US
8 Department of HUD, Department of Veterans Affairs
9 Supportive Housing, also known as the HUD-VASH
10 program, which provides comprehensive case management
11 services to vulnerable veterans as well as rental
12 assistance. This progress can be attributed to the
13 work of our dedicated staff as well as our
14 partnership with DVS and the US Department of
15 Veterans Affairs and the service providers.

16 DHS operates a short-term veteran
17 residency called Borden Avenue Veterans Residency.
18 The Borden Avenue Residence is located in Long Island
19 City in Queens, and it provides transitional housing
20 for 104 veterans in Grant and Per Diem and 71
21 veterans in DHS program shelters. The Institutional
22 Community Living serves as the provider and began as
23 the VA Grant and Per Diem Program, which helps fund
24 transitional housing for veterans up to 24 months. To
25 address veterans' needs, Borden has a nurse

2 practitioner and many clinical staff on site to
3 address clients' medical, mental health, and
4 substance abuse needs. To further support veterans,
5 there is an Article 28 clinic right next to Borden
6 where medical and dental services are provided to our
7 veterans and many community members.

8 As an overall service approach,
9 prevention is a key piece of our strategy in
10 addressing veterans' homelessness. As valuable as
11 temporary emergency shelter can be for families and
12 individuals with no housing option, a shelter should
13 not be considered a home. Building on this approach,
14 DHS places prevention efforts at the front door of
15 our agency goals with the aim of helping keeping
16 vulnerable New Yorkers in stable housing environments
17 through multiple neighborhood services of which have
18 been tailored to meet the needs of our veterans. To
19 carry out this vision, focus on prevention service,
20 the Human Resource Administration, HRA, has
21 established a Homebase program, which is a community-
22 based prevention program that serves as the first
23 point of entry for those who are at risk of becoming
24 homeless. Homebase assists individuals and families
25 in overcoming immediate housing instability that

1 could result in homelessness while also helping
2 clients develop plans for longer term stability. Our
3 Homebase staff across the 5 boroughs are available to
4 evaluate the specific needs of their clients and
5 offer several services to help New Yorkers secure
6 housing stability including services for eviction
7 prevention, assisting in accessing public assistance,
8 emergency rental assistance, job placement, education
9 assistance, relocation assistance, and short-term
10 financial assistance. Specifically to help veterans,
11 DHS has supportive programs the Ridgewood Bushwick
12 Senior Citizens Council Homebase which targets and
13 supports veterans in the community who have
14 experienced homelessness and are at risk of
15 displacement. Through this program, our staff creates
16 profiles for veterans who are at risk of re-entering
17 shelter so we can monitor their needs before their
18 circumstances become dire. This prevention model
19 helps us ensure veterans have the resources and
20 support they need to remain stably housed in their
21 neighborhood. Additionally, to further our prevention
22 service approach, we're implementing our rapid
23 rehousing program to support veterans who are either
24 newly entering the shelter system or re-entering it.
25

3 This program model has slight variations from the
4 standard prevention measures as it focuses on
5 veterans entering shelter and provides enhancers.

6 This program provides veterans with support for
7 finding houses, rental assistance, moving costs, case
8 management. The goal is to ensure that any veteran
9 entering our shelters can be successfully placed into
10 permanent housing as quickly as possible.

11 We also want to highlight the efforts to
12 prevent homelessness carried out by our sister
13 agency, HRA, through the Homeless Prevention
14 Administration, HPA. HPA worked with DHS and the New
15 York City Housing Authority, NYCHA, and several city
16 agencies and organizations to prevent homelessness
17 and New Yorkers remain stably housed in their
18 neighborhoods, another important homeless prevention
19 resource for our veterans and for all New Yorkers
20 across our 5 boroughs. In the Department of Social
21 Service office, we also have our Office of Civil
22 Justice. Through OCJ, tenants at risk can access free
23 legal representation and advice on issues related to
24 housing eviction, harassment, disrepair, and other
25 housing related issues. As mentioned, these services

3 are free and, importantly, available regardless of
4 immigration status.

5 Pivoting to street outreach, DHS is
6 committed to supporting unsheltered veterans and
7 we're proud of the progress we're making to this
8 front. Due to the effort of our staff and work of
9 providers, we have reduced veteran street
10 homelessness to 5 unsheltered individuals. While
11 these numbers are encouraging, our work to reduce
12 unsheltered veteran (INAUDIBLE) continues each day.
13 We continue to partner with the VA on our street
14 outreach and leverage their coordinated medical
15 services to help individuals on the street. As we
16 previously reported to the Council, relationship
17 building is the lynchpin of our street outreach
18 efforts, and we're proud of the outreach staff who
19 engage our veterans with patience, care, and
20 compassion as we stabilize and bring them indoors.

21 Securing and maintaining housing
22 permanency for our city's veterans is a top priority
23 for the Adams' administration. We are committed to
24 finding permanent housing for all the veterans who
25 are currently in our system and ensuring that they
have the tools and support to exit our system and

2 remain stably housed moving forward. In 2021, we
3 helped place 341 veterans into subsidized and
4 unsubsidized placement, and the work continues.

5 There are several programs available to
6 help veterans experiencing homelessness or at risk of
7 experiencing homelessness to secure permanent
8 housing. I would like to briefly walk the Committee
9 through these programs starting with the HUD-VASH
10 program mentioned earlier. Under the HUD-VASH
11 program, eligible low-income veterans receive a
12 Section 8 voucher as well as case management and
13 supportive service from the VA and community-based
14 outreach clinics with the goal to place veterans in
15 long-term housing. Veterans are connected to HUD-VASH
16 programs by servicing providers referred to DHS
17 through the VSU unit which in turn refers veterans to
18 the VA Medical Center where individuals are assessed
19 for eligibility. Once deemed eligible, the housing
20 vouchers are administered by the New York City
21 Housing Authority and New York City Housing
22 Preservation and Development to help veterans access
23 public, subsidized and private market housing. This
24 program partnership has proven successful and
25

2 continues to help veterans experiencing homelessness
3 in our city locate stable permanent housing.

4 We also recognize that in order to create
5 our veterans placement in housing, we must also
6 partner closely with property owners across the 5
7 boroughs to find suitable homes for our clients. To
8 encourage landlords to rent their apartments to our
9 veterans in need, the city launched the Mission Home
10 Program, which recruits property owners to rent their
11 units to our veterans. With appropriate military
12 discharge status, veterans are able to access HUD-
13 VASH vouchers as well as Support Services from
14 Veteran Families, which is also called SSVF, which
15 provides supportive service designated to promote
16 housing stability including access to benefits, cash
17 assistance, housing court advocacy, job training, and
18 employment to low-income veteran families or
19 individuals either residing in shelter or
20 transitioning to permanent housing.

21 We also want to highlight the
22 opportunities available to veterans through our
23 rental assistance program. For instance, when
24 veterans enter, they're exempt from the 90-day
25 shelter stay requirement to qualify for CityFHEPS

2 rental assistance voucher, and veterans are also
3 prioritized for our emergency housing vouchers, EHV,
4 which is a program made available through the
5 American Rescue Plan Act to assist individuals and
6 families who are homeless or at risk of experiencing
7 homelessness in finding housing.

8 As we close, we want to emphasize several
9 key takeaways from our testimony. The Adams'
10 administration is committed to using every tool at
11 our disposal and leaving no stone unturned to house
12 veterans experiencing homelessness. That is the least
13 we could do to express our gratitude for their
14 service and commitment to our nation. It takes a
15 village to support our veterans experiencing
16 homelessness from the federal level all the way to
17 the local providers in our neighborhood, and we must
18 all share the responsibility to properly shelter and
19 house our unhoused neighbors. We remain committed to
20 serving our veterans experiencing homelessness with
21 the care and compassion they deserve and partnering
22 with City Council on these efforts. Thank you, and we
23 welcome any questions that you may have.

24 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, and
25 thank you to all members of the administration for

2 your testimony. I will now turn it over to Chair
3 Holden for questions.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you both for
5 your testimony, and thank you for mentioning the
6 number of veterans in 2021 entering permanent
7 housing. I guess this is for DHS. Can you give us an
8 understanding if those numbers are an improvement
9 from the past or about the same?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: We've
11 reduced veteran homelessness by over 70 percent since
12 we started the efforts of ensuring all veterans are
13 housed. Back in 2014, we had, like I mentioned
14 previously, a little over 1,600, 1,650. We are down
15 now to 542 so that has been a 70 percent decrease.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Are we placing
17 veterans into housing faster than the number of
18 veterans entering the shelter?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I want to
20 say that our prevention service at the front door
21 coupled with the placements that are coming, I don't
22 have the exact number of how many folks are entering
23 at the front door, we could definitely get back to
24 you, but the numbers have been reduced. I want to say
25 that it is coupled with front door prevention and

2 diversion efforts where we have all our intake and
3 then coupled with permanent exit with subsidized
4 housing that we have towards the back door.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, so how does DHS
6 define exit to permanent housing? What is permanent
7 housing? How do you define that?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: If it's
9 permanent housing, it's those individuals that we are
10 able to place using subsidies so we have several
11 subsidies like I mentioned earlier, HUD-VASH, we VASH
12 Continuum, and we have CifyFHEPS, and in addition we
13 also partner with our SSVF providers who provide
14 short-term assistance to move clients so when we say
15 we're placing people into housing, it is into an
16 apartment or room where they have an actual lease.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Can you give us a
18 breakdown of how many female homeless veterans versus
19 male homeless veterans?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I don't
21 have the exact number, but I could tell you that our
22 population, 90 percent, is male versus 10 percent
23 being female.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. Are there any
25 unique services for female veterans? It looks like

2 they're going just into regular shelters, not veteran
3 shelters, right? The female veterans.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Our female
5 veterans fall under single adults and they also fall
6 under families with children. In our single adult
7 system, we have most of them concentrated at one
8 location, specifically for veterans, females. In the
9 families with children, they're not. The way we place
10 our families with children, we place them based on
11 the youngest child's school so if a female veteran is
12 coming in and their child goes to school in the
13 Bronx, we will make an effort to place them closer to
14 their school.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: How many are we
16 talking about, female veterans with children? Do we
17 have a number that are seeking shelter?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: As of last
19 week, March 31st, it was 31 families with children.
20 Out of those 31, I cannot for certain, I will get
21 back to you to tell you how many of those were with a
22 female head of household.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: But our
3 number of female applying with a veteran in the
4 family member is 31.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. How many new
6 homeless veterans are entering the shelter system
7 each year? Do you have a number on that?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: No, I do
9 not, sir. I will definitely get back to you.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Can we get that?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Sure.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: What are some notable
13 trends among homeless veteran population in New York
14 City, like are there are notable trends, like age,
15 are we seeing a different age population, time in
16 service, unsheltered versus sheltered, disability,
17 rating, can you break that down as to any notable
18 trends we're seeing?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: We will
20 have to get back to you also with that data.

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Sir, I
22 think...

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Go ahead.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Sorry to
25 interject here, but, Chair, we can kind of give you

2 some broad level demographics that can kind of give
3 you an idea. Statistically, the veteran population
4 does have a higher probability of disabilities of the
5 non-homeless and non-veteran population. In addition
6 to that, as Iris mentioned, the majority of our
7 homeless veterans are males, single males, for which
8 we are confident that the majority of them are in the
9 Borden Avenue Shelter system because that is the
10 shelter that meets those criteria for single males.
11 As far as the length of the stay and that data, we
12 can get back to you on that.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Does the catalyst for
14 homelessness differ based on the service era? For
15 example, according to the National Center for PTSD,
16 30 percent of Vietnam vets experience PTSD compared
17 to 12 percent of Desert Storm veterans. I don't know,
18 either of you, can you explain what factors are
19 driving homelessness among the different generations
20 of New York City veterans?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: We can
22 get back to you with more specific trends, but as you
23 mentioned 70 percent of our veteran population is 55
24 years or older so we're confident that there must be
25 some underlying trends or additional trends that are

2 associated with war era and the more elderly
3 population of veterans.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. Has DHS
5 implemented Executive Order 65, which requires all
6 city agencies to adopt a standard veteran indicator
7 question on their intake forms?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yes, sir.
9 Everyone that comes through our front door and
10 everyone that is in contact through our street
11 outreach team is asked that question so once you...

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You're doing it, but
13 are the other agencies doing it?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: DHS is
15 doing it, and I want to say that we work closely with
16 DVS and with HRA so that question is being asked.
17 Anyone that comes through our front door, whether it
18 be families with children, adult families, or single
19 adults, it is one of the questions that is asked
20 because it also leads us to have a (INAUDIBLE) list
21 so we can identify early in the process who they are
22 and how to better serve them.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Can we get a copy of
24 that form?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: The form
3 that we complete at intake?

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yes.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: We want to also make
7 sure that other city agencies are doing that, and I'm
8 sure we'll find some agencies that are not doing that
9 so that's why I think somebody needs to check that.
10 Does DHS track the services veterans are receiving
11 separate from city services? For example, does DHS
12 know if a veteran is working with a nonprofit for
13 housing using a Supportive Services for Veterans
14 Families, SSVF, grant or if a veteran is searching
15 for employment with an organization federally funded
16 through the homeless veterans program, the RHVRP
17 grant?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: One of the
19 things that happened several years ago is that DHS in
20 collaboration with not-for-profit and other city
21 agencies and I'm just going to start and then pass it
22 along to Jason since he wanted to talk about this
23 platform, we created a platform where city agencies,
24 not-for-profits, the VA share one mutual platform for
25 all our veterans that are in our system and in their

2 system, and one of the things it does is it gives us
3 the ability to have a (INAUDIBLE) list, it gives us
4 the ability to know what housing we're going to be
5 working with for that individual, the VA is able to
6 tell us their VA status, whether they are a vet or
7 not, whether they're honorable, dishonorable, or non-
8 honorable, and it also gives us the ability among
9 different agencies, like HPD, HRA, DHS, DVS, know the
10 services that we're working so when I say we work and
11 we have a (INAUDIBLE) list, that was one of the
12 platforms that was created and it was to have
13 continuation of service among several city agencies
14 and not-for-profit holders. Jason, I know you wanted
15 to talk a little bit about this a little bit more so
16 I'll pass it to you to talk how we're all using it to
17 better serve our veterans in the community.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Thank
19 you, Iris. I think the Deputy Commissioner handled
20 that and expressed that pretty clearly. I think this
21 is a really strong and bright spot as we define
22 collaboration in city government and our partners
23 outside of city government such as the SSVFs that we
24 mentioned and some of the folks that are going to
25 testify today. It's that collaborative approach that

2 helped us accomplish our goals in reducing veteran
3 homelessness by 70 percent as mentioned earlier. When
4 you really think about how do we accomplish such a
5 large task like reducing veteran homelessness by that
6 percentage, it really comes with not only the buy-in
7 from the community and the buy-in from legislators
8 like yourselves and Committee Members here but also
9 technology, how we speak to one another and be
10 transparent about the services that these folks are
11 being connected with to move the needle and so that's
12 why I highlight this today as such a strong bright
13 spot for collaboration and success in city government
14 and for the veteran homeless population because it's
15 that type of success that we often look back at and
16 say how can we do this with other initiatives and
17 other challenges our community is facing so I just
18 wanted to double down on what Iris said and that
19 we're very proud of that initiative and how it's
20 helped us accomplish that very significant reduction
21 in veteran homelessness today.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: What was the name of
23 that platform you just mentioned?

24

25

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: It's the
3 DVS (INAUDIBLE) list but it's DHS. I'll pass it over
4 to DHS.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Mission
6 Home.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Commission Home?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: It's, as
9 Jason described, it's a platform based on technology
10 where we share information regarding all our vets
11 among different city agencies and the VA and not-for-
12 profit world who service this population so we all
13 have the ability to look at it and see it in real
14 time.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. I have a few
16 questions on mental health and substance abuse before
17 I move on to just a couple other questions then I'll
18 turn it over to my co-Chair. How many DHS veterans
19 are referred to and enter into a mental health
20 program?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: I don't
22 have that exact number on me, but I can tell you that
23 the majority of our homeless veterans do utilize a
24 federal subsidy in the form of HUD-VASH or HUD-VASH
25 Continuum and with those particular rental assistance

2 programs, they do provide healthcare, mental health
3 treatment, and substance use counseling and other
4 supports necessary to help them in their recovery
5 process and maintain their housing. We can
6 confidently say that the significant proportion of
7 homeless veterans that we are serving are not only
8 connected with the services they need but also with
9 the permanent housing assistance they need to
10 maintain a roof over their head. In addition to that,
11 we also provide a percentage of our homeless veterans
12 into supportive housing which also comes with those
13 wraparound services as well, but I'll pause there and
14 turn it over to my Director of Housing to add any
15 additional comments.

16 DIRECTOR ROCK: Absolutely. I can provide
17 those percentages for the types of vouchers and
18 placements that DVS worked with. Last year,
19 approximately 20 percent of our move outs went into a
20 supportive housing setting. In addition to that, 64
21 percent of our placements were with a HUD-VASH or
22 VASH Continuum so that means the majority of our
23 placements moved out with continued support as they
24 made that transition from homelessness to housing.

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: What percentage of
3 veterans in DHS shelters have a substance abuse
4 issue? Does any agency know that?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Can you
6 repeat the question?

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: What percentage of
8 veterans in DHS shelters have a substance abuse
9 issue?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: While we
11 don't have the specific number with respect to the
12 percentage, please understand that those individuals
13 who are experiencing issues of substance abuse, we
14 have clinicians on site at our Borden Avenue Veterans
15 Residence which Deputy Commissioner Rodriguez
16 mentioned earlier, and there are clinicians on site
17 as well as substance abuse counselors and social
18 workers and if a veteran needs services outside of
19 Borden Avenue they would submit a referral for that
20 individual to be seen at another location.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Does DVS know the
22 answer? Commissioner.

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: We'd
24 have to get back to you. We have that type of data on
25 our entirety of veterans seeking services. We'd have

2 to parse it out to identify only those that
3 experience homelessness, but we can get it back to
4 you.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I would think
6 somebody would know kind of a number on how many have
7 substance, you know, that should be like kind of the
8 back of your hand but I'm very surprised like a
9 ballpark number.

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Well,
11 Chair, as we expressed, whether it's substance abuse,
12 mental health support, or any type of clinical need,
13 our priority is to get them with the rental
14 assistance program that we mentioned in HUD-VASH and
15 HUD-VASH Continuum if they're eligible beyond that
16 and then into that permanent housing setting along
17 with that care. We don't dive too deep into the exact
18 data, but we can get it back to you. Our priority is
19 to just get them into that permanent housing so we
20 can get back to you with that data.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, but we should
22 have that number for a hearing like this. It's very,
23 very important. I have some questions on my visit to
24 the Borden Avenue Veterans Shelter. I guess it was
25 Friday I visited really kind of unannounced. I got

2 some interesting observations I'd like to share with
3 you. Prior to the pandemic, the shelter had an
4 excellent relationship with Project Renewal, which
5 provided high quality food to our veterans. Under new
6 management, Project Renewal is out of the food
7 service, and right now the food is pretty bad. It's
8 more or less just those little trays. I'll show you
9 what I mean. These little frozen trays. I don't know
10 if you can see. This is what you get. I don't know if
11 you can really see this. They're not much larger than
12 my hand. This is what the veterans get, frozen, and
13 they have to heat it in the microwave for the last 2
14 years, and that was the number 1 complaint from the
15 veterans there. What steps does DHS take to ensure
16 homeless veterans throughout the city are getting the
17 nutritional meals necessary because right now at the
18 Borden Avenue, the food is pretty bad.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Well, all
20 of our shelters in addition to Borden Avenue Veterans
21 Residence, we follow the New York State food
22 standards which limits the caloric intake, it's
23 spread out between breakfast, lunch, and dinner so we
24 have to follow the portion size, the percentage of
25 protein, starch, vegetables so all of our shelters

2 have to follow those food standards. If a client or a
3 veteran wants a second portion, if there are second
4 portions available, that is allowed.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Have you seen this
6 so-called nutritious food?

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Also, our
8 medical director works hand-in-hand and helps
9 supporting the food standard initiative so she, yes,
10 sir.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: It's sad. We have a
12 full kitchen at Borden that's not being used, and it
13 stopped at the pandemic so we have a nice kitchen,
14 there's a line to get the fresh food where they come
15 with trays. That doesn't exist anymore. They get
16 this. They get these little trays, and they're
17 little. Believe me. Again, my hand. If you guys went
18 there, you'd hear it too from the veterans because a
19 lot of them got really, really upset that they used
20 to have decent food there, and even the Director said
21 we used to get people loving the food and now they
22 hate it, and it looked pretty sad. Our veterans
23 deserve better than that, and, again, I'm not just
24 getting on a soapbox here because I went there on
25 Friday, and that's the number one complaint I got.

2 There's also some other complaints that if a veteran
3 was on crutches, some of the aides wouldn't help them
4 even carry like a cup of tea. They had to try to
5 carry it with the crutches, which is almost
6 impossible. I'm just a little concerned about the
7 treatment that they're getting. Let me talk about,
8 because I mean I know the food is bad there, and
9 we're going to work to try to reinstate some food
10 service in-house, that means cook fresh meals there
11 and give it to our veterans, and this Committee will
12 focus on that, but I also want to go over the look of
13 the shelter, and this is where DHS comes in because
14 it's very important. The Borden Avenue Shelter has
15 individual modules that allow veterans to have their
16 own room with a level of privacy for some only, not
17 the whole shelter, and the Program Director I spoke
18 to, Sarah Ferraro (phonetic), at Borden and every
19 veteran that I spoke to says they prefer these rooms
20 to the congregate setting. Congregate setting in the
21 back of the shelter is just guys out in the open
22 sleeping and just they have to sleep out in the open
23 where they have no privacy. I even spoke to the Mayor
24 about this, and he kind of agrees that these modules
25 are something to look at to benefit the homeless, not

2 only the veterans, but the VA provided these modules.
3 They're about 8 by 10, and they offer privacy,
4 although you could see in, there's like a sort of a
5 tinted glass...

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: A glass.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Have you seen these
8 modules?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yes. We
10 visit our shelters. Yes, I'm fully aware of what
11 you're describing. We have 154 beds under that and
12 then we have another 100 in what you described, the
13 congregate setting. The total population at Borden is
14 254 beds.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: But why not get these
16 modules for the other veterans in that shelter? Why
17 doesn't DHS provide that?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: As you
19 mentioned, Chair, most of our facilities are
20 congregate setting. The reason why the 154 have these
21 modules or, how we want to call it, pods is how it's
22 described with the VA, these are a program that is
23 funded directly by the VA, those are considered our
24 GPG beds where clients have to meet certain
25 requirements in order to be eligible to be placed.

2 I'm not sure when did your tour if you were able to
3 see the VA who is the one that does this analysis and
4 assessment when a veteran walks in the door and
5 that's how they determine who is placed in this
6 location. Part of creating this program required that
7 they actually have these types of modules. Definitely
8 open to working with your office and suggestions, but
9 I did want to explain why there's the difference
10 between the open bay and the individual modules...

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Why does DHS prefer
12 the congregate model?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: The
14 congregate model has been a model that's been in
15 place for many years of the shelter system...

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's not my
17 question. Why do you prefer it over the module?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: There is
19 no right or wrong answer here, sir. I want to say
20 that...

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: There is a wrong
22 answer when you can't defend the congregate model.
23 The congregate model, and I spoke to the Director,
24 maybe DHS should too, and I spoke to the Mayor, the
25 congregate model has a lot more fights in the Borden

2 Shelter than the private modules. The private modules
3 are inexpensive, 8 by 10s, you can see into them so
4 there's not total privacy but there's a lot of
5 privacy compared to the congregate, and that's where
6 the fights are in our shelters around the city
7 because people want privacy, men, women, children,
8 everybody wants privacy, and we're not calling it a
9 home because that 8 by 10 module is not a home, but
10 it feels safer, you can still monitor it, and I have
11 photographs to show you. I showed the Mayor. He
12 agrees. I'm not going to speak for him, but I hope to
13 have him on a tour of that, and it's just horrendous
14 that DHS doesn't treat our veterans any differently.
15 A Marine that was 9 years in the Marines, and he has
16 to sleep in a congregate setting. He deserves a
17 module, but they all do, all veterans deserve it, to
18 have some level, New York City owes these veterans
19 and, my god, they have to sleep in a congregate
20 shelter under fluorescent lights. You look at that
21 shelter. The roof is leaking. There's makeshift
22 little plastic tarps to catch the water. The
23 lighting, it looks like a commercial, it looks like
24 an office, not somewhere where you'd feel at least
25 some sense of humanity there with this fluorescent

2 lighting that would drive anyone nuts in that place.
3 We need to do a little bit more, and we can do simple
4 things by bringing in decent food, by cooking it on
5 site, to a module that would at least give them sense
6 that they're an individual and not just thrown into a
7 big room with other men that they don't know. I'm
8 asking DHS to start investing a little bit in Borden
9 and to come up with some better facilities where they
10 could feel like human beings, our veterans. Before I
11 go any further though, I just think that you should
12 look at the module and the cooking and just the
13 lighting in Borden and visit it more often, visit it
14 to the point where if you looked at yourself in that
15 position, if you looked at yourself, what would you
16 prefer, the congregate where you're just one of many
17 or at least a module, inexpensive module, 8 by 10,
18 but there's nice storage in there, there's a small
19 bed, but at least like you feel like you're an
20 individual. I would like for you to say that at least
21 you'll look at it.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yes, sir,
23 we will work and look at it.

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. I'm going to
3 turn it back to my co-Chair, Diana Ayala, for her
4 line of questioning.

5 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Thank you. Good
6 afternoon. I just want to echo what Council Member
7 Holden said. I mean, I think this is year 2022,
8 congregate settings no longer work whether you're a
9 veteran or a single person, they just don't work, and
10 we're seeing the results of that with larger numbers
11 of individuals choosing to sleep on the streets and
12 on our city subways because they don't work so I'm
13 hoping that somewhere along the lines of this
14 administration's tenure that we're able to come to
15 some sort of a resolution. Obviously, we'd rather
16 have permanent housing than shelters, but in the
17 event, and we have to be realistic, that we do need
18 shelter beds then the preference would always be that
19 they not be in a congregate setting. They just simply
20 do not work.

21 I have a number of questions. In regards
22 to veteran clients, when a veteran client comes in in
23 need of shelter, do they have to do the intake via
24 the Bellevue site?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: We have 4
3 points of intake depending. If they're male, yes,
4 they come in through 30th Street. If they're female,
5 we have 2 points of intake, one in Brooklyn which is
6 HWC, and one in Bronx which is Franklin. We contract
7 our not-for-profit for the females, and it's HELP
8 USA. At the 30th Street, it is DHS staff that is
9 doing it. If it's families with children then that
10 family with children goes in through PATH so it
11 depends the family composition and, based on that, is
12 where the clients will go for their intake.

13 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: So if an
14 individual, let's assume it is a single male, goes to
15 Bellevue, are they then screened to determine whether
16 or not they classify as a veteran and then are they
17 sent to a veteran-specific shelter or are they sent
18 to the general population?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: When a
20 client comes in through intake and identifies as
21 being a veteran, we do have the VA on-site and if the
22 person's not there that day there is a phone number
23 where we can reach the individual so they are
24 assessed by the VA to determine whether or not
25 they're eligible for any benefits that the VA offers

2 and then it's at that point if it's determined that
3 they're not eligible, and I have to say 9 out of 10
4 they are eligible, if they're not eligible, we work
5 with our partners at SSVF to also see whether or not
6 that individual can access any benefits through SSVF
7 so throughout the process, once it's identified, that
8 individual can go to Borden. If not, then they're
9 sent to another location, but throughout our entire
10 intake process whether it's single male, single
11 female, an adult family, and/or families with
12 children, we do connect with our veterans throughout
13 their shelter stay.

14 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Can you tell us
15 what the number of veteran-specific shelters is for
16 New York City?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: We have
18 Borden Avenue is our veteran-specific shelter that
19 services our single men. We also have dedicated beds
20 at Barbara Kleiman in the event that there aren't
21 enough beds at Borden which never happens almost. We
22 also have Tillery, which services our single women
23 who identify as being a veteran. For families with
24 children, while we don't have specific veteran
25 shelters, and largely in part because we want to

2 ensure that we place that family closer to the school
3 where their youngest child attends so we're not going
4 to have specific shelters identified for our families
5 because we don't want that to be an impediment on a
6 child getting to their school. For our adult
7 families, which are families without minors, we do
8 have 2 sites, one that has mental health services on
9 site and the other one doesn't, which is our Beach
10 Family Residence and Star Bright so both of those
11 adult family residences we use to identify adult
12 family veterans so we work with all of these
13 providers in, again, helping and reaching our
14 veterans with our partners from HRA, DVS, and SSVF.

15 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I guess then maybe
16 I asked the question incorrectly. How many dedicated
17 beds? We have one shelter and a couple of scattered
18 beds. What is the total number of beds set aside for
19 homeless vets?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: For
21 singles?

22 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, singles.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Borden
24 Avenue has 254 beds, and we have 100 dedicated beds
25 at our Barbara Kleiman.

2 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: There's a shelter
3 not too far from by my East Harlem office. The
4 Veteran's Residence, is that a shelter?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Sorry.
6 What's the name of it?

7 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: The Veteran's
8 Residence.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I'm sorry.
10 I don't know where you are.

11 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: It's in East
12 Harlem. This one is on East 119th Street.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Oh, that
14 is permanent housing.

15 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: That's permanent
16 housing?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Oh, yes,
18 correct. That's run by VOA.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I want to
20 say VOA is the new provider for it. That is permanent
21 housing.

22 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Gott it. Okay.
23 Thank you for that. Can you explain what your
24 definition of permanent housing is? I know that you
25 guys gave some statistics on the number of

2 individuals that were placed last year, and I'm just
3 wondering, when we say that people were placed in
4 permanent housing, are we saying that they were
5 placed in an apartment, a single room, a shared
6 space?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: When we
8 say we're placing people into permanent housing, I
9 said that earlier, it's a combination. The grand
10 majority of our veterans are placed with a subsidy so
11 either HUD-VASH, VASH Continuum, SSVF, or CityFHEPS,
12 and now we also now have the new voucher, which is
13 Section 8 EHV, and we also place our veterans in
14 Master Leasing where the other side of DSS has 395
15 specific units specifically geared for Master
16 Leasing, that does not include the Veterans Residency
17 Program that is part of supportive housing. Our
18 veterans, when we say being placed in permanent
19 housing, it is someone that will have an actual
20 lease, whether it be a lease for an apartment or a
21 room but they have to have a lease in order for us to
22 use a subsidy.

23 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: If, in fact, it is
24 a room, it is a room for them by themselves or is it
25 a shared room?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Correct.
3 It's an individual room.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: If we're
5 going to be using the CityFHEPS voucher, you have to
6 have a room on your own. It is not shared.

7 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. Of the 341
8 vets that were placed in subsidized housing, do you
9 know how many were placed with NYCHA or through the
10 Housing Connect, Mitchell Lama, the HUD-VASH?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: We will
12 get back to you to give you the exact breakdown.

13 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. Do we know
14 what the number of veterans seeking services at
15 Homebase offices is and what the rate of denial is?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Homebase
17 is part of HRA, and while we know these services are
18 available in the community because Homebase is part
19 of them, I don't have the actual number of the
20 veterans that they serve.

21 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay.

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Speaker,
23 if I may. I would ask that perhaps our Colleague at
24 DVS can maybe speak to placement as well. I think
25 they'll be able to provide some specific data that

2 might be helpful or answer some of your questions as
3 well.

4 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I brought it up
5 because the Homebase offices were brought up so I
6 assumed that maybe you might have...

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: In terms
8 of Homebase, like I said, it's part of HRA, and I
9 know that it's a program that services our 5 boroughs
10 so anyone that is in need of service can apply, but I
11 also know that DVS has a prevention program and
12 that's why we're saying if DVS wants to elaborate,
13 they have prevention and they have aftercare.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: That is
15 correct. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to pass it over to
16 our Director of Housing and Support Services to talk
17 more about that data.

18 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Thank you.

19 DIRECTOR ROCK: You had asked about types
20 of housing placements that veterans were moved into.
21 I do have a breakdown of our data, the 117 veterans
22 that we helped place into housing last year, and this
23 breaks into Mitchell Lama, affordable, or supportive.
24 Approximately 22 percent of the veterans that we
25 housed moved into a supportive housing placement so

2 this could be either through the New York New York
3 units or even through Empire State Supportive Housing
4 Initiative. A smaller portion of our veterans, less
5 than 3 percent, moved into Mitchell Lama and
6 affordable, and everybody else was moved into private
7 market units. Does that help clarify your question
8 about where veterans are going when they're being
9 placed into housing?

10 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Somewhat. You
11 wouldn't happen to have the number of NYCHA, would?

12 DIRECTOR ROCK: For the voucher programs,
13 for HUD-VASH and VASH Continuum, which it could be
14 either through NYCHA or HPD, those vouchers are
15 administered through both housing authorities, it's a
16 combined percentage of 64 percent of our placements
17 were put into with the vouchers. In regards to
18 veterans who are residing within NYCHA, if you give
19 me just one moment.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: 2,800.

21 DIRECTOR ROCK: Thank you.

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: I didn't
23 know you'd get that so quick, Dana. Sorry.

24 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. It was
25 mentioned today that we know of at least 5 unhoused

2 veterans that are within the city's radar. Is that a
3 question that is routinely asked when the outreach
4 unit is out there and their first point of contact
5 with individuals, is that a question that has to be
6 asked and is always...

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

8 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: So we know...

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: When our
10 engagement teams and nonprofits are doing outreach,
11 part of the questionnaire as I mentioned to Chair
12 Holden is asking whether you're a veteran so we rely
13 on the clients letting us know and disclose and then
14 what happens also because we have a system, which is
15 the (INAUDIBLE) or Home Mission, the database, that
16 information is put in the system and then the VA goes
17 behind and checks to see if they're a veteran or not
18 and then notifies them for us. The first question is
19 asked. It's part of the intake for our folks coming
20 in through shelter whether it be families with
21 children, adult family, or single, or if we're
22 engaging you in the community with street outreach.

23 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: That number just
24 seems really low to me. When I'm out on the streets,
25 I see people with a poster (INAUDIBLE) can or cannot

2 maybe be veterans, but they're identifying as such
3 and so the fact that we have 5, the number...

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I want to
5 make it clear. We have 5 unsheltered veterans, which
6 still remain on the street. We have another 49 that
7 we've been able to bring into our system, that are
8 part of the street housing division, and they're a
9 part of either in a stabilization bed or a safe haven
10 bed so 49 are in the (INAUDIBLE) shelters that fall
11 under the street, and then we have 5 that are part of
12 the (INAUDIBLE) list, that are part of the outreach
13 team that we're trying to engage to bring them in and
14 try to convince them that we want them to come into
15 shelter.

16 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Out of the 49, were
17 those placements recent? Did they happen last week or
18 the last 2 weeks?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: It's
20 continuing. It's daily engagement. I will have to get
21 back to you to tell you what days of when they've
22 been coming, but I do know that in our stabilization
23 and in our safe haven we have 49, and then we have 5
24 that are unsheltered.

2 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, I'm telling
3 you that that number doesn't seem right, but I
4 (INAUDIBLE) predict why it might not be accurate.
5 There's been a lot of controversy as of late
6 regarding the removal of homeless folks from the
7 train stations and from encampments. My understanding
8 is that when outreach workers are out there and
9 they're making contact with unhoused individuals,
10 they usually, especially for specialized beds and for
11 safe havens, there has to be a number of contacts
12 that are made before the person is deemed eligible
13 for those types of units. With the ongoing raids and
14 people being displaced and moved from one place to
15 another, are you comfortable enough, do you feel that
16 this is going to allow you to do your job to the best
17 of your ability because I find it really difficult if
18 we're moving people around that we're going to be
19 able to service them in the way that we intend to
20 service them if we don't really know where they are.
21 The continuity of service, as you know, is vital to
22 getting an individual to accept housing to begin
23 with, which can be a very tedious process. We're
24 talking about it can take upwards, up to a year,
25 sometimes I've heard cases where 2 years, but we know

2 that the individual is on X corner every single day.

3 If we move the person, now we're starting the clock

4 all over again so I would really like to get on

5 record what are your thoughts on that because I don't

6 know how that is helpful and how that impacts this

7 work.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: The

9 approach that the new administration has been taking

10 is we're doing a collaboration with several city

11 agencies. I know you're talking about when we're

12 going out there and engaging folks. It's being done

13 currently now through DHS in partnership with

14 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in

15 partnership with NYPD in partnership with Sanitation.

16 As you may know, Speaker Ayala, it takes more than

17 one engagement to try to convince someone to come in

18 the door so, yes, I understand when you say I go to

19 the corner and you see this person on the corner,

20 we're going to be continuing to go out there. One of

21 the things this administration has made a commitment

22 is opening over 500 beds, of which we last week

23 opened 3 different facilities and it is for that same

24 reason. We're ready to, when anyone wants to come in

25

2 those doors, be able to offer them a bed and bring
3 them into our system.

4 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: In all fairness,
5 those 3 sites that were opened last week were
6 commitments that were made through the de Blasio
7 administration, and there has been absolutely no
8 money put into any type of supportive housing in this
9 year's budget so that concerns me. It's a real
10 concern. Listen, we're all partners in this so I
11 don't want, I really just I'm trying to get to the
12 bottom line here because I want to know what are we
13 doing right, right, and what can we be doing better,
14 and I just really feel uncomfortable with the way
15 that we are moving folks along. Now, I am not saying
16 that I or anyone on this body condones allowing
17 individuals to sleep on the street. I happen to know
18 a lot of them by name. I've lost a lot of them on the
19 street by hypothermia, because they have underlying
20 illnesses that are not being treated. I understand
21 and I am completely in favor of making those contacts
22 and trying to facilitate the transition to some sort
23 of temporary and eventually permanent housing.
24 However, I think that by virtue of dismantling
25 encampments in the way that we're doing it, we're

2 doing a disservice to the work that you're trying to
3 do out on the streets because now you have no idea
4 where John Doe is because John Doe is no longer
5 there, and we know because only 5 people have
6 accepted assistance that John Doe is also not in the
7 shelter system so where is he. That should be cause
8 for concern. People should be outraged about that. It
9 is inhumane to do that as well. Oftentimes in
10 government, we're either to the left of something or
11 to the right of something, and I find that there's a
12 lot of commonality, there is a really, really big
13 gray area, and we need to work together in order to
14 ensure that all unhoused individuals that are out on
15 the street for whatever reason, for substance use
16 disorder, because they have mental health issues,
17 because they lost their job, they lost their
18 apartment, they don't feel safe in the kind of
19 shelter setting, that we are able to identify them in
20 a way that allows us to better service them. I'll
21 leave it at that. I know this is not something that
22 we're going to remedy, and I don't expect you to have
23 an answer to that, but I really think that it is
24 important as the Chair of this Committee that I say
25 that publicly because it is something that is

2 weighing very heavily on my mind and on the minds of
3 every other single provider that is out there doing
4 this work, which is difficult to begin with, and we
5 shouldn't be making it hard.

6 I have a couple questions regarding the
7 food. Did the city move away from purchasing raw food
8 and cooking it on site because it was more cost
9 efficient to do it precooked?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Not all of
11 our facilities have the ability to cook meals on
12 site. There are some that do have a full kitchen as
13 Chair Holden has expressed at the Borden Avenue
14 Residency, but for the most part our facilities, what
15 they do is they subcontract the meals, and it is
16 prepackaged and we have to follow the food standard
17 which is unfortunately 2,200 calories to be provided
18 throughout the day. In doing so, the food comes and
19 we warm them up and then we service them to our
20 clients.

21 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Are these
22 culturally relevant meals? Do you know?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RUSSELL: Yes,
24 ma'am, they are. If a client requests a culturally
25 competent meal, we will absolutely serve him or her.

2 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Perfect. Okay. I
3 have 2 more questions and then I'm going to defer to
4 my Colleagues because I know that they've been
5 waiting for a while. Can you tell us what the average
6 number of referrals for permanent housing is and how
7 long the waitlist is for those units?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I'm sorry.
9 Can you repeat your question?

10 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: How many people are
11 being deemed eligible for permanent housing, and how
12 long is that waitlist? How long could a person that
13 is in shelter and qualifies, meets all of the
14 guidelines, how long are they in shelter?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: One of the
16 things our administration has done and we had done
17 previously, and the administration has continued to
18 support, the minute a veteran walks into our door,
19 there is no waitlist to qualify for a subsidy. It is
20 the one population that you walk in the door, we can
21 issue you a voucher immediately. There is no 90-day
22 requirement to qualify for a subsidy for a veteran.

23 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. Do we know
24 what services are available to veterans living in
25 supportive housing settings?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Supportive
3 housing, I'm not sure if DVS would be able to answer
4 that question. I know supportive housing falls under
5 HRA and they monitor those contracts so,
6 unfortunately, I can't speak 100 percent of the
7 services supportive housing is providing there.

8 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Deputy
10 Speaker, what I'll say is, again, also adding onto
11 your previous question, as we said veterans have a
12 higher probability of being eligible and access
13 federal subsidies so one thing we are really proud of
14 is the federal dollars that we bring back into New
15 York City's economy with all our veterans who are
16 eligible for those subsidies but, in addition to
17 that, because they are federal subsidies, they do
18 come with those supportive services through the VA
19 and our nonprofits and ourselves who perform these
20 critical time intervention type of support and
21 engaging with them before, during, and after they are
22 housed permanently. I'm going to pause there though
23 and pass it over to our Director of Housing to talk
24 more about that service and the question you had.

2 DIRECTOR ROCK: Thank you, Jason. To get
3 back to the question about supportive housing, I hope
4 I can provide a little bit of insight into it. I do
5 think it depends on the type of supportive housing
6 that the veteran is moving into and vets have access
7 to different levels (INAUDIBLE) New York New York
8 units. We also work with the Empire State Supportive
9 Housing Initiative, and that has different criteria
10 than New York, New York where a veteran just needs a
11 disability, it doesn't have to be mental health, it
12 could be medical or substance, so the case management
13 might be different than a type of supportive housing
14 where it is more geared towards veterans who are
15 chronically homeless or have severe and persistent
16 mental illness so the degree of support that's
17 offered really depends on the program and the level
18 of supportive housing.

19 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I'm going to assume
20 then that the (INAUDIBLE) supportive housing units
21 have an expertise in both mental health and substance
22 use disorder?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. One
24 thing I have to say that supportive housing that has
25 been brought up, and Dana has said it depends on what

2 type of housing so we have supportive housing that
3 services people with mental illness, we have
4 supportive housing that services people with
5 substance use, we have supportive housing units that
6 are for seniors so it depends on which supportive
7 housing unit the individual is being found eligible
8 in order to be able to move them into those locations
9 so those are kind of the supports that come when
10 you're moving them into these type of settings.

11 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. I'm sorry,
12 really quickly, I'm sorry to the Council Members that
13 are waiting. I lied a little bit. I didn't mean to
14 but just 2 last questions. I'll ask both of them at
15 the same time so that you can just (INAUDIBLE) Of the
16 CityFHEPS rental assistance voucher recipients, how
17 many veterans have received Shopping Letters, and how
18 many are utilizing vouchers for permanent housing
19 and, 2, can you give us an update on how many
20 veterans were among seniors who benefited from the
21 Elder Rent Assistance Program?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Deputy
23 Speaker, I'll share some of DVS' numbers on this, and
24 this kind of goes into your previous question in that
25 70 percent of the veterans that we've worked with

2 utilize some form of supportive housing or supportive
3 mental subsidy so that HUD-VASH, HUD-VASH Continuum,
4 and supportive housing so only about 30 percent of
5 our homeless population that we've been working with
6 do not fall into one of those categories. On the
7 CityFHEPS side, that makes up, at least on our end,
8 one of the lowest populations of veterans who are
9 using those subsidies, which again speaks to how our
10 homeless veteran population is not a significant
11 burden on the tax levy dollars invested in the city.
12 We bring a lot of federal dollars back for this
13 population, and we're really proud of the work we do
14 in collaboration with DHS, HRA, NYCHA, HPD, and the
15 VA and HUD to make sure that they get these eligible
16 benefits that they've earned in their military
17 service, but I'm going to pause there and pass it
18 over to DHS to comment.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: To respond
20 to your question about the Shopping Letter, as I
21 mentioned earlier, all our veterans, if we are not
22 able to direct them from the front door and move
23 along into our shelters, do qualify for a Shopping
24 Letter because there's no day requirement so once
25 they arrive, there's an assessment done, and if it is

2 through CityFHEPS that they're going to be moving out
3 that's when we're issuing, but as Jason has described
4 many of our vets qualify for either HUD-VASH or VASH
5 Continuum, and we prioritize them for those type of
6 subsidies.

7 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Do we know what the
8 number of Shopping Letters is in the universe today?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: What I
10 want to say is we have 300, close to 400 individuals,
11 all of them are eligible for a Shopping Letter.

12 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Thank you. That's
13 helpful. The last question, (INAUDIBLE) seniors.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: I'm
15 sorry, Deputy Speaker, what was that?

16 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: The last question
17 was, unless you wanted to add something else to that,
18 the last question was an update on the veterans who
19 were seniors who benefited from the Elder Rent
20 Assistance Program announced by the de Blasio
21 administration in 2017?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Before I
23 pass that over to DHS, I do want to add that from our
24 perspective and I'll Director of Housing speak more
25 on this, and as the Deputy Commissioner mentioned, we

2 do drive our veterans who are eligible for the
3 federal subsidy to that subsidy because it is more
4 sustainable, it's not a 1-year program, it's ongoing
5 so it is more sustainable for the longevity of their
6 health and welfare. Just another reason why there may
7 be a lower proportion of vets that do utilize
8 CityFEHPS but like the Deputy Commissioner said
9 they're all eligible regardless. I'll pause there and
10 pass it over to DHS regarding your question for the
11 Senior Rental Program.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: The
13 Elderly Rental Assistance Program that you're
14 referencing that de Blasio announced in 2017 was
15 continuing from our understanding from a proposed
16 mansion tax that the state was supposed to, it never
17 passed, so that program never also materialized.

18 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Was there an
19 alternative identified?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Not that
21 I'm aware of.

22 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. I'm done with
23 questions so Council Member Holden. Thank you, guys,
24 so much.

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Deputy
3 Speaker, and before I turn it over to my Colleagues,
4 I have one question. Is it true that the Borden
5 Avenue Shelter once provided every client with a
6 module and that DHS took many of them down several
7 years ago when the VA money ceased?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: At one
9 point, I want to say yes, the whole facility had
10 modules. The reason why, I would have to get back to
11 you on that. I don't know why now we have 2 different
12 programs or 2 different settings.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, because I don't
14 thin it's a good idea that DHS has 2 separate
15 categories of veterans, federal veterans and city
16 veterans, because that's what they're doing now so we
17 need to change that and give everybody a module.

18 I'm going to turn it over to my
19 Colleagues for their questions for the
20 administration. I'd like to say that we will be
21 limiting Council Member questions and answers to 5
22 minutes. The Sergeant-at-Arms will keep the timer and
23 let you know when your time is up.

24 Back to Aminta, our moderator.

2 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
3 Holden. I will now call on Council Members who have
4 questions. Again, if you can, please use the Zoom
5 raise hand function and I will call on you in the
6 order in which your hand is raised. We'll begin now
7 with Council Member Palladino.

8 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Good afternoon.
10 I want to commend my Chairman, Council Member Holden
11 and Ayala. I can't thank you enough for putting this
12 together. I want to start by saying how terribly
13 disappointed I am in the Department of Veteran
14 Services. Stats that were not able to be given to us
15 today is a disgrace. We asked for numbers that you
16 should know right off the top of your head and the
17 fact that you can't is appalling to me. To chime in,
18 let me take a sidebar. We're talking about 279
19 people. We're not talking about 2,000,079 people. How
20 come you don't have numbers for this? How is it
21 possible that our veterans are being fed dog food,
22 absolute dog food, at the one main homeless shelter
23 that you have that Member Holden went and visited on
24 Saturday, which I can't wait to go to. This is an
25 outrage to me, absolute outrage. What is the budget

2 for the Department of Veteran Services? How much
3 money is allotted to this department? Does anybody
4 have an answer for that?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Yes. As
6 Assistant Commissioner of Department of Veteran
7 Services, our total budget is 6 million.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Ha. 6 million
9 dollars, 6 million what? You didn't finish? Read the
10 rest of it.

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: A little
12 over 6 million dollars.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Oh, a little
14 over 6 million, okay.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: And 1
16 million of that is (INAUDIBLE)

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: That 6 million
18 is taking care of how many people? 279? 400? What's
19 the number? Because I'm looking at papers here that
20 quote 2013, 2015, what's happening now in 2021, 2020?
21 Where is this money? Where is this money going? How
22 much of this money goes to payroll? How much of this
23 money goes to payroll to pay your salaries? How much
24 does our veterans actually see out of this money?
25 There's got to be a hell of a lot more as Diana had

2 said than 200 or 300 people that are homeless,
3 veterans that are homeless, veterans that are facing
4 mental illness, drug addiction, alcoholism. How are
5 these people being treated? How are my Vietnam
6 veterans being treated? Very poorly at best. This is
7 a disgrace, an absolute disgrace. I'm very
8 disappointed in today's meeting, and we, the Veterans
9 Committee, Chairman Holden and myself, feel very
10 strongly about this. I'm going to speak for you, Bob.
11 I'm sorry, but we've got to get the bottom of this
12 because this is wasteful spending, and I'm going to
13 call on an audit. I want this department audited
14 because this is ridiculous. This is absolutely, we've
15 been on now, it is 10 minutes of 3, and I've listened
16 to departments bounce back and forth and hand it over
17 to this one who handed it over to that one who handed
18 it over to this one. No. I'm a bottom line type of
19 person. I want bottom lines, and, you know what, you
20 people can't supply us with bottom lines. You knew
21 this meeting was happening today. Why weren't you
22 better prepared?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN:

24 Councilwoman, I just want to iterate that our budget

25

2 is dedicated to the 250,000 plus veterans in New York
3 City.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Okay.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: DHS has
6 oversight of our shelter systems, and we work in
7 collaboration with them to deliver services to those
8 276 that you're referencing, but we are happy to work
9 with you and the rest of the Council to address any
10 of those concerns that you've brought up to us today
11 and we will be getting you back the data that was
12 requested today.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: How do you
14 explain the food that Council Member Holden held up?
15 How do you explain that? You say 250,000 so out of
16 250,000, answer me this, why are there only 279 of
17 them in shelters? Okay, that's like 1 percent. Come
18 on. Come on. You can do better than that. This is
19 absurd. This is absurd, absurd, absurd.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Council
21 Member...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Council Member
23 Ariola, do you have what to say?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN:
25 Councilwoman, I would like to add that the Department

2 of Veteran Services since July 2020 has partnered
3 with the Governor's office and HelloFresh to donate
4 2,000 fresh meal kits per week to veterans and active
5 service members, and since July 2020 we are proud to
6 share that we've delivered over 200,000...

7 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Meal
9 utilizing the HelloFresh partnership. That's thanks
10 to the Black Vets for Social Justice and Wendy
11 McClinton and her team as well so we are familiar
12 with the food assistance requests and the needs of
13 our community, and we deliver on those needs when
14 they're brought to our attention.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Well, I know a
16 lot of very unhappy veterans. Something else I'd like
17 to ask you about. What does it mean to have Purple
18 Heart status? What are the advantages and what is the
19 Purple Heart status? How many programs does that give
20 to our veterans? How many Purple Heart recipients in
21 the state and the city of New York? What leverage
22 does that have for the veterans that qualify? I'm
23 interested to know.

24

25

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN:

3 Councilwoman, Purple Heart status is reflective of
4 those who were awarded a Purple Heart...

5 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: I know, don't,
6 don't, don't. I know what you mean, what a Purple
7 Heart means. I'm asking you what does the Purple
8 Heart status mean for every veteran that has received
9 the Purple Heart. What is the Purple Heart status?
10 How do they benefit by it? Do they qualify for
11 additional services because they're going to fall
12 underneath the Purple Heart status? What is it?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Yeah, it
14 is an expansion of benefits. Those...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Elaborate.
16 Elaborate.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: I can
18 get back to you on the very specific details, but
19 it's broad and I'm not sure what you're comparing it
20 to as well. Are you comparing it to a veteran who
21 does not have a Purple Heart? Is that you're asking...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: No, I'm just
23 curious. We're going to have it passed. It's up there
24 in Albany, and we're going to have the Governor sign
25 off on it. I just would like to know what Purple

2 Heart status means and how many recipients are there
3 and what does that qualify them for. That's all, a
4 simple question.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN:

6 Understood. Obviously, we value the sacrifice of our
7 Purple Heart recipients and...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: (INAUDIBLE)

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: We're
10 going to review the resolution, and we can provide
11 more of those details and data that you're requesting
12 today.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALLADINO: Terrific. Okay.

14 Thank you very much.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: You're
16 welcome. Thank you for the questions, Councilwoman.

17 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you,
18 Council Member Palladino. I'm now going to call on
19 Council Member Brewer followed by Council Member
20 Ariola. Over to Council Member Brewer.

21 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
23 much. I have 2 questions. This is something that goes
24 back to Loree Sutton when she was head of the agency.
25 Why is it not possible to find out from the Marines,

3 my husband is a vet from Vietnam so I'm very familiar
4 with how they operate, the Marines, Air Force, etc.,
5 who is being discharged to the City of New York so
6 that people don't end up in the shelter system and
7 we've never been able to do that so I want to know if
8 you are thinking along those lines, sort of
9 preventative.

10 Number 2, I want to understand Mitchell
11 Lama. I passed a bill years ago that gives veterans
12 preference for Mitchell Lama housing. I don't know if
13 anybody's taking advantage of that.

14 Number 3, at 330 West 95th Street, you
15 have 135 veterans permanently housed. That's thanks
16 to me. I have to be honest with you, and I wanted to
17 know if they're other efforts that you're making
18 because people, I'll be honest with you, want to have
19 veterans in their community so if you say we have a
20 building, we have funding, we have hotels all over
21 the place. What are we doing to purchase these hotels
22 for our veterans? Those are my 3 questions so we can
23 replicate 330 West 95th Street.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Thank
25 you, Councilwoman, for those questions, and I'll
start by addressing your first question regarding

2 preventative care. We are working with the DOD and
3 federal government to get access to lists of those
4 transitioning veterans that are coming and returning
5 to New York City as their home of residence. That
6 list is known as the RONA list. We are utilizing that
7 list and kind of partnering it with kind of our
8 previous efforts and Mission Vet Check initiative.
9 Mission Vet Check was a partnership with the Mayor's
10 Office for Community Mental Health to make supportive
11 calls to veterans to have a conversation with them
12 but to also educate them on the benefits and
13 resources that they're eligible for here in New York
14 City. With that effort, we called over 35,000
15 households. We want to continue that approach to
16 performing outreach to continue to educate these
17 veterans of their benefits that they're eligible for.
18 As far as preventative, that's one measure. We also
19 have an aftercare prevention team. I'll turn it over
20 to Director of Housing and Support Services to talk
21 more about that aftercare model and that critical
22 time intervention.

23 DIRECTOR ROCK: Thank you, Jason. We do
24 have an aftercare and support model that follows
25 veterans 2 years after they moved out so we start

2 within a week of them moving out, we check in with
3 them, they've worked the Veteran Peer Coordinator
4 throughout the process to get housed, and so it's
5 very important that we provide that critical time
6 intervention (INAUDIBLE) up to 6 months then again at
7 (INAUDIBLE)

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUGHRAN: Hey,
9 Dana, I think...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You're breaking
11 up, Dana.

12 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Director, I'm
13 sorry to interrupt but I think at this point
14 (INAUDIBLE)

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We can't hear you,
16 Dana, we can't hear you. We can't hear you, Dana, we
17 can't hear you.

18 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: At this point,
19 we're just going to move on from.. (INAUDIBLE) I think
20 there was a bit of a delay.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We can't hear you,
22 Dana, so somebody else should take over.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I can talk
24 a little bit about the last piece where you had
25 mentioned, Council Member Brewer, about the 95th,

2 yes, it is a Master Leasing, and thank you very much.
3 We worked along to get that with your assistance into
4 permanent housing where it is all geared towards
5 veterans. Something that the administration is
6 looking forward is how we can continue as you said
7 into that, and I want to say because of this program
8 we have others. In total, we have 395 permanent
9 housing that fall under specific veterans in 11
10 different contracts. All of them are within HRA, but
11 we continue to build on that partnership to try to
12 bring additional buildings that we can convert into
13 Master Leasing.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Are you
15 going to give us a list of the buildings that you're
16 trying, because I have a long list of hotels that...

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: We would
18 definitely. It's under HRA so...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm sorry.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Master
21 Leasing and supportive housing all fall under our
22 sister agency, which is HRA, so I'm pretty if you
23 want to share a list with us we can make it get to
24 their way but they're constantly looking and it's

2 something that is very close and dear to our heart
3 and how we can expand on this program.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, and
5 then what about Mitchell Lamas? Who's in charge of
6 getting folks into Mitchell Lamas?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: I think
8 that's where Dana was trying to get the information
9 and is having difficulties with her audio.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Can she
11 send it to the Committee?

12 DIRECTOR ROCK: Absolutely. Can you all
13 hear me now?

14 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: We can hear you
15 now. We can hear you now.

16 DIRECTOR ROCK: Great. Thank you. Mitchell
17 Lama does still offer the preference for eligible
18 veterans, and that is in both city and state-run
19 developments in the Mitchell Lama lotteries. Once a
20 qualified veteran is selected in the lottery, they're
21 placed at the top of an external waitlist, and
22 they're given preference when a unit becomes
23 available. Something that we do at DVS, we've
24 partnered with HPD whenever a waitlist or a lottery
25 is getting to ready to open, they send us the

2 advertisement and we push it out in our weekly
3 newsletter so every time...

4 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

5 DIRECTOR ROCK: We know that a waitlist is
6 opening, we try to push that out to our veterans in
7 the community, and that includes both homeless
8 veterans and those who are stably housed and are just
9 looking to move...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you know how
11 many veterans have taken advantage of it and gotten
12 into Mitchell Lama?

13 DIRECTOR ROCK: I'd have to get back to
14 you on the number from HPD and HPR.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I just would
16 suggest that you tell not just your newsletter but
17 everybody because it is a great opportunity.

18 DIRECTOR ROCK: Absolutely. Thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. It was
20 a good bill by the way, and it is permanent, and it
21 is a bill, and it is the law. Thank you very much.

22 DIRECTOR ROCK: Absolutely. Thank you.

23 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you,
24 Council Member Brewer, for your questions. Over now
25 to Council Member Ariola.

2 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Thank you, Chair,
4 thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and thank you to all
5 my Colleagues who have spoken. I echo all of your
6 concerns, but I'm especially appalled at a statement
7 that was made earlier in the hearing where when
8 Council Member Holden held up a very small package of
9 food you said, I believe it was either Sonya or Iris
10 said, that they are able to get another portion if
11 available. If available. We're having them
12 congregantly live, which is so demeaning and
13 demoralizing, and now when they ask for some of a
14 very small portion that would not fill a child, it's
15 only available if there is more. Do you hear
16 yourselves? You are failing the homeless population.
17 You are failing the veterans who are homeless. You
18 are failing. Your department is failing, and you're
19 treating people like less than human, which will not
20 be tolerated by this body. I think that became very
21 evident during this hearing. We need to legislate, my
22 Colleagues, we need to legislate so that we can make
23 sure that DHS is doing the right thing by our
24 veterans who fought for our freedoms, and I can go
25 into all the different cliches regarding veterans,

2 but the fact of the matter is that they're being so
3 poorly treated and they'd rather be on the street
4 than be in one of the veterans homes. What does that
5 tell you?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: So...

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: No, no, no. I
8 don't have a question because I know you couldn't
9 answer any question that's been posed yet. My
10 question is to my Colleagues, and I ask you please
11 lets really dive into this and lets find out why
12 because each and everyone of us go to veterans'
13 groups and tell them how much we care about them. Now
14 it's time to show them, and I thank you for the time.

15 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you so
16 much, Council Member Ariola. I am now going to make
17 one final call for any additional Council Members who
18 have further questions. If you can please use the
19 Zoom raise hand function.

20 Otherwise, I will turn it now back over
21 to Chair Holden before moving on to public testimony.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Committee
23 Counsel, and, again, I want to thank the
24 administration for their testimony. We have a lot of
25 work to do for veterans and certainly I urge all my

2 Colleagues to visit the Borden Avenue Shelter to see
3 for themselves as to what I'm talking about in the
4 way of housing. Those modules should come back. I
5 think the whole Borden Shelter should be made up of
6 modules. Our veterans deserve that, and fresh food
7 should be cooked there. That's the least we can do,
8 folks at DHS. That's the least we can do for them and
9 certainly find them supportive housing and permanent
10 housing, but while they're at Borden we should treat
11 them the way they deserve to be treated and, when I
12 went there, they weren't, and there were a lot of
13 complaints about the cleanliness of the bathrooms and
14 other things but we have a debt to pay to our
15 veterans and that veterans' shelter at Borden is not
16 doing the job so I ask that DHS put 100 percent
17 modules in their and cook fresh food there, and, as
18 Chair of the Veterans Committee, I will work toward
19 that and do it as quickly as possible, and I'll
20 certainly get Mayor Adams there to tour that because
21 I know he feels the same way I do. Again, I want to
22 thank the administration, and I'll turn it over to
23 our moderator to call on members of the public to
24 testify. I want to thank my Colleagues also. Thank
25 you.

2 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
3 Holden, and thank you to members of the
4 administration. I also want to turn it over to Deputy
5 Speaker Ayala before we move on to public testimony
6 if you'd like to offer any remarks before we excuse
7 the administration.

8 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I want to say thank
9 you for being here today. I think, again, we're
10 partners in this, good, bad, or indifferent, and I
11 think it behooves all of us to try to figure out how
12 to work collaboratively and how to include all voices
13 in the conversation so that we are successful. I
14 think at the end of the day, right, we all have a
15 mandate to ensure that people that deserve and need
16 resources in the city receive them with dignity. I
17 agree in terms of the meal allotment. I understand
18 that there's a specific mandate, but I think that
19 that mandate is not sufficient to meet the
20 nutritional needs of grown men so I am pretty
21 sensitive to that as well, and I think that if
22 there's a way that we can kind of try to figure that,
23 and I get the challenges of congregate meal settings
24 are not always appropriate, but we have to figure out
25 a better alternative for that. We're seeing the same

2 issues across the board in our schools and our senior
3 centers, and I think as we move to a supposedly
4 healthier model, we're also wasting a lot of the
5 city's resources, a lot of money just goes wasted on
6 food that is trashed because people either don't
7 recognize it, don't like it, and so I think it's
8 actually more cost efficient to draft a plan that
9 includes the recommendations of the people that are
10 actually eating the food. Thank you for being here
11 today, and thank you, Council Member Holden, and
12 hopefully we can move along collectively. Thank you.

13 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
14 Ayala, and thank you to members of the
15 administration.

16 We are now going to move on to public
17 testimony. As a reminder, all public testimony will
18 be limited to 3 minutes. After I call your name,
19 please wait a brief moment for the Sergeant-at-Arms
20 to announce that you may begin before starting your
21 testimony.

22 Please note that panelists will be able
23 to register for this hearing until the hearing is
24 closed.

2 The first public panel will be in the
3 following order: Anddy Perdomo, Adam Wzurynek, and I
4 apologize if I'm mispronouncing your name Adam, and
5 finally Kevin Meggett. We will begin now with Anddy
6 Perdomo.

7 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

8 ANDDY PERDOMO: Good afternoon. My name is
9 Anddy Perdomo, and I am the Director of Specialized
10 Housing and Veteran Initiative with Volunteers of
11 America Greater New York. We are the local affiliate
12 of the national organization, Volunteers of America,
13 Inc. I would like to thank Chair Holden and Chair
14 Ayala as well as the other Members of this Committee
15 for the opportunity to submit the following
16 testimony.

17 VOAGNY is an anti-poverty organization
18 that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York by
19 2050 through housing, health, and wealth building
20 services. We are one of the regions largest human
21 services providers impacting more than 11,000 adult
22 and children annually through 55 programs in New York
23 City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are
24 also an active not-for-profit developer of supportive
25 housing and affordable housing with a robust

2 portfolio of award-winning permanent supportive
3 housing and senior housing properties with more in
4 the pipeline.

5 First, we at VOAGNY would like to thank
6 Chairs Holden and Ayala and Members of this Committee
7 for holding this hearing. Volunteers of America has a
8 long history of serving our city's veterans through a
9 variety of programs and residences with many
10 cumulative years of experience with this population
11 among our staff. We operate a number of permanent
12 supportive housing residences for veterans and
13 provide a number of services at these locations and
14 elsewhere. We are also one of the providers of
15 supportive services for veterans and families in the
16 city. Connecting veterans with services in the areas
17 of rapid rehousing and homeless prevention, housing
18 placement and aftercare, we also participate in the
19 New York City Continuum of Care Vet Task Force. The
20 citywide effort to functionally end veteran
21 homelessness have led to great progress towards this
22 goal. To use our own programs as an example, at a
23 number of our residences where there are beds or
24 units set aside for veterans, referrals for that
25 population have slowed down tremendously. In some

2 cases, this has led to the organizing of filling
3 veteran's units with general population clients.
4 Dwindling referrals of veterans experiencing
5 homelessness and needing housing placement is a sign
6 of great progress of this issue. However, this does
7 not mean that we as providers and clients can claim
8 mission accomplished. The veteran population remains
9 housing insecure, often facing extremely high levels
10 of rent burden, and one emergency away from falling
11 into rental arrears and experiencing homelessness
12 again. Individuals and families do not always qualify
13 for traditional rental assistance programs,
14 particularly when there is no underlying social
15 service need. We as advocates in our city need to
16 look beyond the success of ending functional veteran
17 homelessness and keep in mind the precarious nature
18 of housing for this population.

19 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

20 ANDDY PERDOMO: There's still need for
21 flexible and creative rental assistance solutions
22 like the one offered... I'm muted?

23 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: You can keep
24 going.

2 ANDDY PERDOMO: Okay. There's still need
3 for flexible and creative rental assistance solutions
4 like the one offered through the SSVF known as the
5 Shallow Subsidy, a subsidy created for veterans who
6 are not eligible for traditional rental assistance
7 but, however, are still experiencing rental burden as
8 well as for financial assistance and employment
9 opportunities to address the root issue of low income
10 in a high-cost city. Finally, we need to be
11 developing and preserving more affordable housing
12 overall. Thank you for your consideration.

13 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you,
14 Anddy, for your testimony. I am now going to call on
15 Adam Wzurynek for testimony.

16 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

17 ADAM WZURYNEK: Good afternoon. Thank you,
18 everyone. Since 1978, Services for the Underserved
19 has provided services for people in and around New
20 York City whose lives have been unsettled by
21 circumstances beyond their control. Our mission is to
22 drive scalable solutions to transform the lives of
23 people with disabilities, people in poverty, and
24 people facing homelessness. Solutions that contribute
25 to righting societal imbalances. Our uniqueness lies

2 in our ability to take what we learn on the ground
3 and use it to change systems and impact policy. By
4 delivering high-quality services that address the
5 complex circumstances of each person, we help
6 transform lives, improve neighborhoods, and boost
7 future generations. SUS is a non-profit leader in
8 housing and supportive services for low-income New
9 Yorkers living with disabilities. We are proud to use
10 our expertise to deliver high-quality, trauma-
11 informed supports to our nation's veterans. We'd like
12 to thank the City Council for its undaunting support
13 of the New York City Department of Veteran Services,
14 DVS, a key partner in the effort to end homelessness
15 among veterans in our city. SUS calls for continued
16 New York City investment in DVS and expanding the
17 housing placement and pure support of resources of
18 this agency to bolster its capabilities across our
19 increasingly expensive rental market. The New York
20 Department Veteran Services HUD-VASH Continuum has
21 been a lifeline to permanent housing for many
22 veterans who historically do not qualify for federal
23 VHA services. DVS staff have been strong partners
24 across our continuum of care through this project
25 where they actively participate in community case

2 conferencing and barrier busting to support homeless
3 veterans access of permanent housing. SUS' programs
4 partner closely with numerous other city agencies to
5 identify, engage, and serve homeless and at-risk
6 veterans across the 5 boroughs.

7 Another department which embraces a
8 collaborative approach to the mission of ending
9 veteran homelessness is the Adult Families, Veterans,
10 and Special Services Department of DHS. We strongly
11 encourage the City Council to support expanding these
12 services to prioritize access for all homeless
13 veterans to emergency resources and housing aid. I'd
14 like to thank and mention HPD who have also been
15 critical. SUS asks the City Council to support our
16 outreach priorities for veterans in New York City by
17 identifying all women and families with children who
18 served in the US Armed Forces who are in the New York
19 City homeless system by supporting access to SSVF,
20 DVS, and other core services for unsheltered and
21 street homeless veterans as soon as they are
22 identified, bolster access to services for low-income
23 families in the New York City DOE system, helping to
24 ensure that military and veteran families who are
25 facing eviction and homelessness are connected to our

2 existing prevention resources at Homebase, SSVF, DVS,
3 and legal aid partners, and enhance resources and
4 peer support for LGBTQ veterans, many of whom have
5 faced resistance and barriers for housing in the
6 past.

7 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

8 ADAM WZURYNEK: The city should continue
9 to support Homebase Prevention Aid, a policy that not
10 only works but makes good fiscal sense. We need to
11 support continued veterans aftercare support, and we
12 ask the City Council to recognize the importance of
13 meaningful employment as a core component to
14 veterans' recovery, and to support veterans' access
15 to career opportunities within the city.

16 Lastly, the continued shortages of safe,
17 affordable, permanent housing remain a barrier to
18 reducing and effectively ending veteran homelessness
19 in our city. Veterans' preference and financial
20 incentives for landlords to house homeless veterans
21 is needed in all New York City low-income and market
22 rate housing units. We ask the City Council to
23 continue to support policies that prioritize homeless
24 veterans for all housing in the city and to consider
25 further support for set-aside units for homeless

2 veterans in our system. SUS remains a strong partner
3 in the citywide efforts to end homelessness among
4 veterans. We are confident that with the continued
5 support of our key government partners, the
6 commitment of our City Council, and the leadership
7 from the Adams' administration that New York City
8 will continue to deliver excellent supports to
9 veterans in need and collectively will ensure that
10 any veteran experiencing homelessness will be able to
11 find and keep a home that meets their needs,
12 preferences, and long-term housing stability goals.
13 Thank you.

14 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, Adam,
15 for your testimony. We will now move to Kevin Meggett
16 for testimony.

17 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

18 KEVIN MEGGETT: Thank you very much for
19 having me. I'm testifying..

20 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Kevin, we're
21 having some difficulty hearing you. You sound very
22 far away.

23 KEVIN MEGGETT: Can you hear me now?

24 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Yes, much
25 better.

2 KEVIN MEGGETT: Okay. Thank you so much.

3 I'm testifying on behalf of myself. I'm a war veteran
4 of the Persian Gulf, Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

5 It's been very refreshing listening to City Council
6 trying to combat the homeless crisis. However, the

7 homeless crisis, the issue is in order to attack

8 homelessness, you have to get to the root of the

9 problem, and the root of the problem generally is

10 that of gentrification so veterans are being

11 gentrified out of a picture that they rightfully

12 belong and until we can address gentrification as

13 that being a problem on a federal level, there's no

14 rent regulations federally, or at least there doesn't

15 appear to be, because people are being displaced. We

16 didn't have this problem 20, 30 years ago so we have

17 to ask what has happened, and there's a lot of urban

18 renewal and we're looking at people of color being

19 removed in that process. That's on the federal level.

20 On the state level and the city level, I

21 really think these vouchers, and I'm not talking

22 about HUD-VASH at this particular time, but the LINC

23 vouchers and the other vouchers, they sort of need to

24 be, is homelessness just a New York City problem or

25 is it part of a New York State problem as well, and

2 the city and state can do a better job working with
3 one another to make sure that a city voucher could be
4 honored perhaps in a state. In so many cases,
5 veterans are saying the voucher isn't enough. It's
6 barely enough to cover the rent, but that's because
7 you're in New York City. If you took that same
8 voucher, to say, Rochester or Buffalo, let the state
9 also bear some of the blame as it comes to
10 homelessness. It should be a shared responsibility.
11 Veterans, in my humblest opinion, should be a
12 protected class. We've made the sacrifice, I signed a
13 contract willing to pay up to my life for the
14 liberties that everyone is now enjoying, and until
15 you take corporate plutocracy out of homelessness,
16 it's going to always thrive. You can't have
17 capitalism, capitalism eats poverty, and so we act
18 like poverty doesn't exist, but what's happening,
19 it's getting broader and wider and no one's
20 addressing the real, real issue. The other issue is
21 Borden Avenue, we need to start looking at helping
22 veteran services. If I had a veteran service...

23 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

24 KEVIN MEGGETT: If I had a veteran service
25 that catered towards other vets, we wouldn't have a

2 problem as it pertains to treatment or maltreatment
3 because veterans really know how to take care of
4 other veterans. The problem is you have non-vets that
5 don't know nothing about veterans or veteran services
6 making decisions and they're not bringing us to the
7 table.

8 Lastly, and I thank you for the leeway,
9 there's no welcome sign in New York City that says
10 hey, welcome to New York. On 42nd Street, there
11 should be a big billboard that says welcome to New
12 York, vet, if you need services, come here. I would
13 like to see City Council put more than just 2.1
14 million dollars toward veterans and veteran issues.
15 That's less than minimum wage for the amount of
16 population we have. I yield. Thank you for having me.

17 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you very
18 much, Kevin, for your testimony and to this entire
19 panel for your testimony. I'll turn it over to Chair
20 Holden if you have any remarks or questions for this
21 panel.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Kevin, for
23 that excellent testimony, and you're right. We should
24 have certainly a welcome sign and a lot more service
25 for our veterans. We're going to work on that in this

2 Committee, and I know Deputy Speaker Ayala will also
3 do that. I want thank this group. Again, Kevin and
4 the rest of the panelists, please reach out to my
5 office if you have some specific suggestions how we
6 address this. Kevin, did you ever stay at or know
7 people that have stayed at Borden?

8 KEVIN MEGGETT: Yes, I did, and it's very
9 problematic all the way around. What they don't also
10 tell you is that there's a gang culture in Borden
11 Avenue as well. I know veterans that have come home
12 that are not allowed to have police contact that have
13 gotten into issues where a fight has happened and the
14 person left because if the cops are called, they
15 violate their parole and they go back to jail. Matter
16 of fact, I know a gentleman that just got housed 2 or
17 3 days ago under that situation and he was actually
18 street homeless. The numbers of homelessness is way
19 whatever you, there's no such thing as functional 0,
20 that's an oxymoron. When you see street homeless
21 people, 1 in every 4 people that you see in New York
22 City that are street homeless have served this
23 country and shame on anyone that totes around
24 functional 0.

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you for that.

3 Back to Committee Counsel.

4 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thanks again to
5 this panel. I'll now call on our next panel. Our next
6 panel will be in the following order: Wendy
7 McClinton, Deborah Berkman, and Coco Culhane. We will
8 begin now with Wendy McClinton.

9 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

10 WENDY MCCLINTON: Good afternoon, everyone
11 in your respective roles. I thank you for this
12 opportunity to testify today. As you may already
13 know, I lead a great organization in Brooklyn called
14 Black Veterans for Social Justice. I'm also the Chair
15 of the New York City Veterans Advisory Board. As
16 such, I can assure you that veterans are core members
17 of our city's neighborhoods and communities. They
18 represent people who succeed and struggle like anyone
19 else but are categorized by toughness and a
20 confidence to solve problems. They don't run away
21 from a fight. I ask you to please consider how
22 veterans can be a part of the city's fabric to
23 channel their skills and suggestions into the
24 structure of our city's new administration.

3 As a veteran and a former homeless
4 veteran, my biggest concern is that New York City
5 does not have a commitment to include veterans as
6 part of its fabric. It's not veteran friendly. There
7 is verbal support when Memorial and Veterans Day
8 comes around or when we march in parades, but there
9 isn't an appreciation that we kept this country safe
10 from threats foreign and domestic. I won't deny that
11 these are public relations concerns, but not only New
12 York City but New York State is a beacon for all
13 people in the United States and being more welcoming
14 to veterans and their families sets a tone of
15 acceptance and openness to residents and tourists
16 alike. Affirmations to veterans would send a positive
17 message and reach deeply into neighborhoods where
18 they live to convey appreciation and a sense of
19 inclusiveness which would encourage active civic
20 participation and connect veterans to resources
21 thereby reducing veteran homelessness. On March 25,
22 2021, I was elected Chairperson of the New York City
23 Veterans Advisory Board. As Chairperson of the
24 Veterans Advisory Board, I clearly see issues that
25 affect veterans and how the city deals with them.
This starts with the need for more accountability and

2 action from city agencies. While the Department of
3 Veteran Services has grown annually from 3.8 million
4 in fiscal year 2017 to 6.2 in fiscal year 2022, there
5 is a need for better inter-agency collaboration and
6 accountability from other city agencies DVS interacts
7 with to ensure results. The VAB, the Veterans
8 Advisory Board, listens to and hears reports on
9 multiple veteran issues including medical and mental
10 health, business, aging, transportation,
11 homelessness, social services, housing, and family
12 support, especially during the time of transition
13 from military to civilian status. Improving
14 coordination would reduce veteran homelessness and
15 strengthen their family and their structures.

16 I respectfully recommend you consider
17 either legislation or an executive order that calls
18 for representatives of city agencies with...

19 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

20 WENDY MCCLINTON: Direct policy experience
21 to be a part of the Veterans Advisory Board. This
22 includes the Office of Mental Health, which can help
23 with housing and services, the Agency for Children
24 Services, Health and Hospitals Corporation, the
25 Department of the Aging for our senior services, the

2 Human Resource Administration, the Department of
3 Social Services, Housing Preservation and
4 Development, the Department of Homeless Services, and
5 the Small Business Services where they can produce
6 training, employment opportunities, and other things
7 for our veterans. This doesn't have to be another
8 bureaucracy but rather programmatic accountability to
9 answer questions and follow through with programmatic
10 results. This connection here is a formal memorandum
11 of understanding between the city and the federal
12 government connecting the VAB and connecting DVS with
13 representatives from the United States Department of
14 Veteran Affairs and the Veteran Administration. While
15 there currently is a satisfactory connection with the
16 VA's medical services, there is inadequate
17 communication in areas of homelessness, housing, and
18 other much-needed services. In essence, it's a one-
19 way street. As a result, there is weakened
20 communication between 2 critical players that could
21 address veterans' concerns and even more so now with
22 the proposed closing of several VA medical facilities
23 in New York City and the suggested budget cuts to
24 DVS. This reinforced board of representation would be
25 the best way to structurally change veteran services

2 in New York City. Agency representatives attached to
3 the VAB in collaboration with DVS will ensure better
4 accountability. This would create superior outreach,
5 better marketing of VA services, and assist with the
6 very many services needed by family members and
7 veterans and their caregivers. This suggested small
8 change in how we collaborate and communicate will
9 result in better services given to our city's
10 veterans, their families, and the community and set
11 New York City on a path of veteran wellness. Thank
12 you for your attention to veteran issues during the
13 developmental phase of your administration. Black
14 Veterans for Social Justice, the New York City
15 Veterans Advisory Board stand ready to work with you
16 to improve the quality and level of services for all
17 New Yorkers, especially our veterans. Thank you.

18 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you very
19 much for your testimony, Wendy. I'll now call on
20 Deborah Berkman for testimony.

21 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

22 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Chair Holden, Deputy
23 Speaker Ayala, Council Members and staff, good
24 afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak
25 on the Committees on Veterans and General Welfare on

2 veteran homelessness in New York City. My name is
3 Deborah Berkman, and I'm the Coordinating Attorney of
4 the Shelter Advocacy Initiative at NYLAG. The Shelter
5 Advocacy Initiative provides legal services and
6 advocacy to people experiencing homelessness in New
7 York City, and NYLAG also hosts a specifically
8 veteran-focused practice. Many of our clients
9 experience homelessness are veterans of the Armed
10 Forces and have had particular barriers accessing
11 Department of Homeless Services, or DHS, shelter.
12 Many of NYLAG's veteran clients suffer from post-
13 traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, resulting from
14 their time in the military, and many of my clients
15 experiencing PTSD just cannot access shelter because
16 they cannot navigate DHS' intake process. DHS' intake
17 process can take up to 2 days with most of that time
18 spent waiting in crowded rooms. Clients are often not
19 fed and not able to take essential medications.
20 Clients report that staff at the intake centers are
21 verbally aggressive and demeaning toward shelter
22 applicants. Clients with disabilities are not
23 accommodated, especially those with mental health
24 disabilities, and many of my clients report that DHS
25 police at the intake centers are physically

3 aggressive. As a result, I have met with many veteran
4 clients experiencing street homelessness who are
5 willing to go into shelter but could not make it
6 through the intake process. One of those clients, Mr.
7 T., was a veteran who suffered extreme PTSD from his
8 time in combat. Mr. T.'s PTSD was triggered by being
9 in tight spaces and in crowded environments. He and
10 his partner were discovered sleeping outside in
11 Manhattan and were brought by homeless outreach team
12 to DHS intake center. While in the crowded intake
13 center, Mr. T. began to experience flashbacks and
14 extreme anxiety leading him to react by raising his
15 voice and screaming. DHS staff would not allow the
16 homeless outreach worker to de-escalate the situation
17 and in the subsequent escalation a DHS police officer
18 ended up punching Mr. T. in the face even though he
19 had not shown any physical aggression. Mr. T. then
20 fled the intake center, and him and his partner
21 returned to the street. DHS must amend its intake
22 process so that it is accessible to veterans with
23 mental illness, and, to that end, all intake staff
24 should be trained in trauma-informed practices and
25 de-escalation. Clients who self-identify as having
disabilities should be awarded immediate provisional

2 accommodation so they can get through the intake
3 process.

4 Additionally, as Chairs Ayala and Holden
5 and others have pointed out, many of my veteran
6 clients who identify as having PTSD are afraid to
7 sleep in a room with multiple other people around
8 them and, unfortunately, most of DHS single adult
9 shelters consist of congregate shelters where there
10 can be up to 100 people in a room. This is not an
11 appropriate setting for our veterans or really for
12 any person experiencing homelessness. DHS must expand
13 its inventory of single and double rooms to meet the
14 mental health needs of veterans with PTSD.

15 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

16 DEBORAH BERKMAN: I will be submitting
17 more fulsome comments in writing. Thank you.

18 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thanks so much,
19 Deborah, for your testimony and for submitting the
20 rest of your testimony via written testimony. I will
21 now turn to Coco Culhane for testimony.

22 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

23 COCO CULHANE: I am Coco Culhane, the
24 Executive Director of the Veteran Advocacy Project.
25 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

2 We focus on working with veterans who
3 have post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury,
4 and substance use issues. I was surprised at how
5 little substance use was discussed as well as
6 discharge status. I heard DHS mention it, but those
7 are the 2 highest predictors for homelessness among
8 veterans, and it seemed like they need to be a
9 stronger focus. I do want to say that I think the
10 city has done an incredible job in terms of reducing
11 veteran homelessness 90 percent and it shows that if
12 there's political will we should be able to do it for
13 every population, but it seems like we stalled out
14 once we sort of declared victory with chronic
15 homelessness, and every year somebody comes and
16 testifies about the 3 or 5 or 7 street homeless
17 veterans that there are, and every year I say it's
18 ludicrous. While that was being said, I reached out
19 to our intake advocate and asked if he could tell me
20 how many in the last month. Most veterans, anyway,
21 are not sitting on street corners. They have survival
22 skills. We have veterans sleeping in cars. We have
23 veterans who do not appear, everyone has this sort of
24 idea of identifying a homeless people, we have vets
25 with their backpacks on the subway, and they're not

2 identifying as homeless. I just wish that everyone
3 would stop sort of, maybe say it differently. We have
4 encountered 5 street homeless veterans because there
5 are just so many else out there. There's also, the
6 Adams' administration is doing all these clearings of
7 encampments. Who's screening for vets? These reports
8 have shown that out of hundreds of individuals only 5
9 have entered shelter. I'm not sure if that's accurate
10 at this point, but this is something DVS could do.
11 Where's the outreach. There are very likely to be
12 vets in a lot of these individual places. I also just
13 want to echo what was said by Deborah Berkman about
14 the entrance process in the shelter system and that
15 we seem to require vets with PTSD to be tortured
16 before we can get them a voucher, and we're working
17 on reasonable accommodations right now to prevent
18 individuals from having to enter the shelter system
19 and still be able to get various vouchers and
20 subsidies. I would hope that there could be a clearer
21 system to accommodate those individuals and make sure
22 that they don't have to be triggered in order to seek
23 assistance. So many of our clients say they will not
24 go anywhere near. Right now, we have one client who
25 was actually sexually assaulted in a shelter and has

2 been in her car for over a year, maybe 2 years, and I
3 know we are working with DVS on that to hopefully get
4 around the system, but it shouldn't be that way,
5 right? It shouldn't be traumatizing to enter a
6 shelter.

7 SERGEANT POLITE: Time expired.

8 COCO CULHANE: Thank you.

9 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, Coco,
10 for your testimony, and thank you to this entire
11 panel. I'll turn it over to Chair Holden for any
12 remarks or questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Again, thanks for
14 this expert panel. Wendy McClinton, Chair of the
15 Veterans Advisory Board, magnificent job that she
16 does, and so many other organizations that you
17 volunteer, Wendy. We certainly appreciate you. I know
18 you're at every press conference concerning veterans
19 and Chuck Schumer's press conference where obviously
20 we're addressing closing the Veterans Hospitals which
21 is totally ridiculous. From time to time, it happens
22 and they do it and we'll have to beat it back again.
23 Certainly, Deborah, thank you so much for your
24 testimony, and you're actually right. Deborah Berkman
25 does a magnificent job in that area obviously and

2 representing the homeless veterans and certainly,
3 Coco, we need to talk more because you have so many
4 ideas and obviously you're seeing the ones that are
5 falling through the cracks, and we need to know who
6 they are and try to help them, and my Committee will
7 do that and certainly I will so let's keep in touch.
8 Thank you all, very, very, 3 powerful people,
9 advocates for veterans, and thank you so much. Back
10 to you, Committee Counsel.

11 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
12 Holden. I'll now turn to our next panel which will be
13 comprised of Towaki Komatsu.

14 SERGEANT POLITE: Time starts now.

15 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Towaki, I'm not
16 sure if you're speaking, but I cannot hear you.

17 Towaki, it seems like your audio is not
18 working for some reason. I don't know if you have
19 headphones which you could use potentially. Now we
20 can hear you.

21 TOWAKI KOMATSU: (INAUDIBLE) (Phone
22 conversation) (Going to be getting you a job
23 (INAUDIBLE) That is not what I do) Right, but... (I am
24 (INAUDIBLE) hearing) I understand that. (And on that
25 date, I will assist you in making sure that your

2 (INAUDIBLE) pushed through) But also... (That is what I
3 need (INAUDIBLE)) But even something... (Maybe
4 (INAUDIBLE)) Event setting that aside, Mr. Banks...
5 ((INAUDIBLE) understand) Mr. Banks told me to talk to
6 you about NTT the last time I saw, I saw him on March
7 28th. I specifically asked him about NTT. He told me
8 to talk to you. I told him... (About what exactly?)
9 About NTT Data, meaning I talked to Mr. Banks on July
10 19th in Kew Gardens. He told me that he would look
11 into the matter. He has not. I've never received a
12 response once. (So I don't know what NTT, what that
13 part, that was adjudicated) It's still being
14 litigated. (order to show cause, and that was...)

15 So here's the thing. Next week, I have a
16 hearing against this company called NTT Data. It's
17 still subjecting me to wage theft dating back to
18 2012. All of you are paying for that contract. Mr.
19 Holden, you asked about how can you help veterans.
20 Can you pressure HRA to terminate that contract
21 immediately and I guess watch that oral arguments
22 hearing on April 12th. Thanks for your time, and
23 condolences about your mom. Thanks.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Very good, Towaki.
25 Thank you so much for that.

2 AMINTA KILAWAN, COUNSEL: Thank you,
3 Towaki, and thank you to everyone who testified
4 before this hearing today.

5 At this point, if we have inadvertently
6 missed anyone that would like to testify, you can
7 please use the Zoom raise hand function now, and we
8 will call on you in the order in which your hand is
9 raised.

10 All right, seeing none. We have now
11 concluded public testimony for this hearing. I now
12 turn to Chair Holden for any closing remarks and to
13 close out the hearing.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you so much,
15 Aminta. I just want to thank everyone, Deputy Speaker
16 Ayala, the administration, my Colleagues, veteran
17 groups and advocates for your contributions today.
18 Many thanks to the Veterans Committee and General
19 Welfare Committee staff for their hard work in making
20 this hearing possible. It's now 3:40. This hearing is
21 hereby adjourned. Thank you. [GAVEL]

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1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON
2 GENERAL WELFARE

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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 May 12, 2022