



**Testimony of Clarice Joynes, Executive Director,
Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs,
before the
Committee on Veterans, New York City Council**

May 31, 2007

Good Afternoon, Chairman Monserrate, and members of the Committee and Council. My name is David Mario Curcio, and I serve as Assistant Director and Special Counsel of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs.

For nearly 20 years, the mission of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs has remained the same - to offer information and make referrals for veterans and members of the military who may require the assistance of the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs, the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, the Department of Defense, New York City Agencies, and relevant service providers throughout New York City. This has been – and continues to be – accomplished through numerous channels of outreach.

The Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs maintains a highly comprehensive website that can be accessed anytime through www.nyc.gov. This resource contains detailed information about benefits offered by federal, state, and city government and instructions on how to access them, all available from the main menu on the left-hand side of the page. In addition to general information, there are sub-categories for information on housing, employment, and education benefits, which can also be easily accessed from the benefits menu.

Another excellent web-based resource is Access NYC, an online service through which any City resident can screen themselves, and their family, for more than 20 federal, state, and city health and human service benefit programs in seven languages. Visitors to this site can also learn how to apply, search for office locations, and print partially complete applications for some of the programs. Among these programs is the Veterans Property Tax Exemption offered by the City of New York's Department of Finance to veteran homeowners. In the upcoming year, we plan to make Access NYC fully operative for veterans and all benefits that may be available to them through City agencies.

In addition to our website, any veteran who calls 311 with a question about veterans' benefits is immediately transferred to the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs for further assistance.

The proposed Intro. 508-a calls upon the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs to send annual written notice to "all veterans living within the City of New York" to inform them of federal, state, and city benefits to which they and their families may be eligible. The objective of this measure is already accomplished through the various informational channels and resources that I have just mentioned.

In addition, to send annual written notice to "all veterans living within the City of New York" is impractical for several reasons. First and foremost, there is no centralized database of New York City veterans. Those who identify themselves as veterans do so largely through self-reporting models, such as the US Census, the US Department of Veterans Affairs, New York Harbor Healthcare System – Manhattan and Brooklyn campuses, and the James J. Peters VA Hospital in the Bronx. These sources cannot provide such a listing, because not all veterans apply for benefits and services, or report themselves as veterans to the Census. Similarly, to request any such information from the VA hospitals would raise an issue of healthcare privacy concerns.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there are about 258,000 living veterans in the five boroughs of New York City. Again, this is a rough estimate based on statistical projections made from the 2000 census, which is a self-reporting model. Assuming the number is accurate, taking into account production and mailing costs, such an endeavor would easily cost well over \$100,000 to annually accomplish.

The Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs remains committed to its mission as a liaison agency to the military and veterans community. We are constantly updating our website with the most up-to-date information on veterans' benefits and events. We also continue to produce a newsletter that is distributed to the more than 400 chapters of veterans organizations located throughout the five boroughs. In addition, anyone who either visits our website, or contacts our office, can request to be added to our mailing list in order to receive a copy of our newsletter, either electronically, or by way of traditional mail.

We are also currently in the process of upgrading Veterans Memorial Hall, a place where veterans can come to interact with representatives from the more than 20 veterans service organizations housed at the Hall, anchored by the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs. Mayor Bloomberg recently announced during his Mayoral Welcome for our sea services during Fleet Week, that Veterans' Memorial Hall will soon be welcoming Veterans of Modern Warfare, an organization representing veterans from the current war, as its newest tenant. The Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs will continue to serve the military and veteran community as it has done for the past two decades.

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