

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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April 29, 2015
Start: 1:21 p.m.
Recess: 2:45 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room
16th Floor

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Fernando Cabrera
Andrew Cohen
Alan N. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone

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

Loree Sutton
Commissioner
NYC Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs -MOVA

Coco Culhane
Found and Director
Veteran Advocacy Project

Kristen Rouse
New York City Veterans Alliance

Ralph Piechota
Director
Small Business Development Center in Brooklyn

Dan McSweeney
President
United War Veterans Council

Avi Leshes
Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Amanda Spray
Psychologist and Veterans Liaison
NYU Langone Family Clinic
Cohen Veterans Center

2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, are we ready?

4 All right, thank you, Sergeant-At-Arms.

5 [gavel]

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon. I'm
7 Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the City Council
8 Veterans Committee. Today, the Committee will be
9 looking at the role of veteran liaisons in various
10 city agencies. In 2013, the City Council enacted and
11 Mayor Bloomberg signed into law Local Law 42, which
12 required each city agency to designate an employee
13 who to act as a liaison with the Mayor's Office of
14 Veterans Affairs, and with veterans within that
15 agency. These positions were designed to help
16 veterans both inside and outside City agencies to
17 navigate the complex and often frustrating process of
18 applying for and receiving city benefits and
19 services, as well as to help the nearly 7,900
20 veterans employed by the City of New York understand
21 those policies, which are applicable to them.
22 Despite their importance, we know little about how
23 these positions actually work, and MOVA's role in
24 coordinating them. By law, MOVA may request that

25

2 these liaisons receive periodic training to help
3 better serve veterans.

4 Today, the committee would like to hear
5 about how often MOVA conducts these training
6 sessions, the types of information that MOVA provides
7 to the liaisons, and the effectiveness of the
8 training when a veteran seeks help from a particular
9 agency. In addition, the committee will be voting on
10 today Proposed Resolution 329-B sponsored by a member
11 of this committee, and a good colleague Council
12 Member Alan Maisel of Brooklyn. Which calls on the
13 State to pass legislation requiring SUNY and CUNY--
14 and the CUNY Board of Trustees to adopt standardized
15 policies. Which mandate that all schools and
16 universities within those systems award college
17 credits to veterans for appropriate course work based
18 upon their military training and experience.

19 As the committee heard in our hearing
20 last month, both SUNY and CUNY currently leave this
21 completely up to each individual institution.
22 Therefore, you can have a situation where a veteran
23 at one CUNY school receives credit for a particular
24 course while a veteran at another CUNY school may
25 not be able to receive credit for a similar one.

2 Student veterans should have as many choices as
3 possible of public colleges and universities to
4 attend where they can benefit from their service and
5 receive due credit. These schools should also have a
6 standard policy for all schools within the system,
7 and help give those veterans those choices. I urge
8 my colleagues to support this resolution, and I want
9 to thank Council Member Maisel for his work on this
10 important issue. It happens to be something that he
11 cares very deeply about, not only veterans' issues,
12 but being a former educator, education and issues
13 related to helping people attend higher education
14 institutions. So I want to congratulate him. It's
15 his first bill out of this committee, and I know he
16 worked hard on it. And before we call for the roll
17 call vote, I want to acknowledge--in case I have to
18 leave--my other members of the committee who have
19 joined us, Council Member Andrew Cohen, Council
20 Member Fernando Cabrera and Council Member Maisel and
21 me. So, before the clerk calls the roll, I will ask
22 Council Member Maisel to say a few words.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you, Mr.
24 Chairman. You know, one of the most commonly stated
25 ideas when we're involved in work time activities is

2 that when the veterans come back, we have to help the
3 veterans. You hear this all the time. Always help
4 the veterans. You know, and then they come back and
5 we don't help the veterans. Whether it's problems in
6 the VA or I mean job opportunities. We just don't do
7 a very good job of it. And experiences with the GI
8 Bill 60, 70 years ago demonstrate that the GI Bill
9 was instrumental in making so many of our World War
10 II veterans into professionals, which they would
11 never have had the opportunity without that kind of
12 legislation. Well, this is not the GI Bill.

13 However, in the course of what we're able to do in
14 New York State, just by giving college credits for
15 military service we are going to be doing a great
16 deal for our veterans. And, of course, there's a
17 long established history of giving lifetime credit
18 for those people who have engaged in various kinds of
19 careers. Colleges and universities do that all the
20 time. We know that service in the military gives the
21 members of the military tremendous skills and
22 experiences, which should be translated into a
23 college credit.

24 So I'm very happy to be able to introduce
25 this bill. And I want to thank the Chairman and the

2 staff, and all the members for their help and
3 cooperation in getting this resolution passed. And
4 now, we have to get the New York State Legislature
5 to--to recognize this resolution and do something
6 about it. So thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council
8 Member Maisel. Of course, being a former member of
9 the Assembly helps. I'm hoping you can find a few
10 sponsors in the Assembly to introduce the bill.
11 That's his homework. [laughs] All right, if that's
12 official, it's official.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: I'll start there
14 as soon as we get out of here.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's on the record
16 but I want to thank you for your advocacy on this
17 issue. It's very important. Something that I think
18 everybody supports, the Administration supports, the
19 Council supports. Anything that we can do to help
20 the veterans continue their professional and other
21 endeavors, that's something that we ought to do. So,
22 I also want to thank the staff. As you mentioned,
23 who put in countless hours to help draft this
24 resolution. Eric Bernstein the committee counsel. I
25 know Kevin Ryan was here. I don't know if he's still

2 here. Yes he is. The Policy Analyst doing all the
3 research and, of course, Redmond Haskins, my Veterans
4 liaison, for helping us get to this point. And I'll
5 ask the clerk to call the roll so we can continue the
6 hearing.

7 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk.
8 Roll call vote Committee on Veterans Proposed
9 Resolution 329-B. Chair Ulrich.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I vote aye.

11 CLERK: Cabrera.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I'd like to
13 congratulate the sponsor of the bill, Council Member
14 Maisel, and also I'd like to acknowledge today, Mr.
15 Chairman, that I've been joined by my mom. And so
16 she's here today, and I was always taught to honor my
17 mom and my father so--and my father was a veteran.
18 And so, with that I vote aye. Thank you so much.

19 CLERK: Cohen.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I vote aye.

21 [coughs]

22 CLERK: Maisel.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Aye.

24 CLERK: Vallone.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good timing.
3 Aye.

4 CLERK: By a vote of 5 in the
5 affirmative, 0 in the negative and no abstentions,
6 the item has been adopted.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you very
8 much. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Congratulations.
10 You can applaud for that if you like so that he gets
11 a great [applause]--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [off mic] I
13 thought we don't allow applause.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We allow applause.
15 It's up to the individual chair. Please, go ahead.
16 All right, thank you. I know there are other
17 committees. I myself was just at Environmental
18 Protection. There are several others that are still
19 going on. Some members may have to excuse themselves
20 and leave, but we want to thank them for coming.
21 We're going to start the hearing now. We've also
22 been joined by Council Member Vallone who came in at
23 the right time. Thank you. Good timing. We're
24 going to start with the Administration. We're joined
25 today by the MOVA Commissioner, Loree--Dr. Loree

2 Sutton regarding the topic of today's hearing, the
3 veteran liaisons. Thank you. Loree.

4 LEGAL COUNSEL: Eric Bernstein, Committee
5 Counsel. Can you raise your right hand, please. Do
6 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
7 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this
8 committee, and to respond honestly to council member
9 questions?

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I do.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Start.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay. Well, good
13 afternoon Chairman Ulrich and members of the City
14 Council Committee on Veterans. I'd particularly like
15 to thank Council Member Maisel and the rest of the
16 members of Committee on Veterans for your advocacy in
17 support of students--student veterans within the CUNY
18 and SUNY systems. That's fantastic and well worth
19 the previous applause. I'd also like to welcome Mom
20 Cabrera for being here. That's exciting. Where'd
21 you go, mom? There she is. Let's give mom a big
22 round of applause wherever she is. [applause] Okay.

23 My name is Loree Sutton. It is my
24 privilege to serve as Commissioner of the Mayor's
25 Office of Veteran's Affairs. Thank you for the

opportunity to participate in this hearing concerning oversight of the veteran liaisons at city agencies.

To recap MOVA's mission, we provide services and connect veterans after doing military and their families to the vast New York City, State and Federal programs, as well as public-private resources, which are available throughout the City of New York.

There are over 225,000 veterans who live in New York City coupled with military families and over 20,000 retired veterans bringing the population to over 500,000 who call New York home. In addition to MOVA's role with respect to policy coordination, direct services, referrals and community engagement, we are co-located with a dozen veteran service organizations including the American Legion, Veterans are Still Warriors, Marine Corps League, Montford Marine Association, United War Veterans Council Catholic Veterans, Haitian-American Veterans, Rockasa and Big Apple Chapter, Jewish War Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, VFW of NYPD and Southwestern Asian Veterans. Known as Veterans' Hall, this collaborative sharing of office resources, workspace and meeting room facilities provides frequent

2 interaction and foster MOVA's ability to support
3 these VSOs and the veterans they represent.

4 I commenced duties on September 1, 2014
5 when Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed me as
6 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans
7 Affairs. I completed my initial assessment of MOVA
8 local community needs and government and not-for-
9 profit services and resources available throughout
10 the city in December of 2014. During the assessment,
11 MOVA engaged and visited over 250 city offices and
12 agencies, veteran service organizations, veteran
13 membership organization's healthcare programs,
14 educational institutions, public and private
15 organizations on a tour of the five boroughs. Mayor
16 de Blasio's vision, informed by my assessment,
17 resulted in new strategic top tier priorities. This
18 top tier includes ending veterans homelessness.
19 During his State of the City address in January,
20 Mayor de Blasio promised to end veteran homelessness
21 by the end of 2015. As part of the Mayor's challenge
22 to end veterans' homelessness across the nation, the
23 city has placed 200 veterans in homes so far this
24 year. Further, the city has established housing
25 plans for 96% of the remaining veterans. Thus, the

2 best available housing options have been identified
3 for approximately 950 veterans. MOVA serves as a
4 member of the Continuum of Care Veterans Task Force,
5 and is working with city and community agencies to
6 engage real estate developers and landlords as part
7 of this strategy.

8 Mental Health and Behavioral Health for
9 Vets. MOVA is partnering with Chirlane McCray, the
10 First Lady of New York City, to incorporate veterans
11 and their families as a component of her mental
12 health road map community-based strategy. Having
13 hosted a recent two-day sampler tour of holistic
14 programs supporting veterans and their families in
15 New York City, MOVA is working with the First Lady's
16 team, the Department of Health and Mental Health, and
17 other city agencies to facilitate cultural
18 transformation and implementation of a community-
19 based public health approach.

20 City Employment and Recruitment
21 Initiative. MOVA will soon begin helping agencies to
22 adopt best practices in recruiting veterans for city
23 career opportunities. Efforts will include adopting
24 standard intake questions to help veterans and their
25 family members identify themselves, and apply for

2 available career and other opportunities. These
3 strategic priorities are strengthened through
4 collaborative city interagency partnerships many of
5 which have developed since last September. These
6 partnerships include the Veteran Business Road Map
7 and improving contract performance with Small
8 Business Services and the Mayor's Office of Contract
9 Services. Thwarting financial predators, a
10 partnership with the Department of Consumer Affairs.
11 Behavioral Health Task Force linking up with the
12 Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Department
13 of Correction. IDNYC the Veterans Designator
14 partnering with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
15 Affairs. Ending veteran homelessness with DHS, HRA,
16 HPD and NYCHA and MOVA website improvements with TDC
17 and DOITT. And finally, the Mental Health Community
18 Road Map with DOHMH also working with the First Lady
19 and her team.

20 In conducting my assessment, and while
21 formulating MOVA's key policy and programmatic
22 priorities, I have learned that the critical day-to-
23 day role shared between veteran liaisons and their
24 interactions with MOVA's team is impressive indeed.
25 I'm delighted to share how MOVA works in close

2 collaboration in partnership with our agency liaisons
3 during today's hearing. The veteran liaisons at city
4 agencies are an integral resource for MOVA whose
5 staff members draw upon liaison expertise and
6 knowledge within their respective agencies across the
7 city--across the city government to support the needs
8 of veterans and their family members on a regular
9 basis. In a reciprocal supportive role, MOVA is a
10 trusted resource for city agency liaisons.

11 MOVA's relationships with agency liaisons
12 form the bedrock foundation upon which MOVA with our
13 expertise concerning veterans' specific needs and
14 liaisons with their expertise in agency-specific
15 resources, build alliances and keep each other
16 informed of emerging developments. In accordance
17 with Local Law No. 42 of 2013, the head of head of
18 each city agency should designate an employee to act
19 as a liaison to veterans within that agency. The
20 roster of veteran liaison names is posted on the
21 mobile website as required by the legislation.
22 Liaison contact information remains on file with
23 MOVA.

24 The role of agency veteran liaisons is
25 threefold. Number one, to advise veterans employed

2 by their respective agencies of benefits and services
3 available to veterans at each agency and employ
4 personnel policies applicable to veterans at such
5 agency. Number two, to assist veteran employees
6 employed by their respective agencies in accessing
7 non-city benefits, resources and services to which
8 they are entitled. And three, to confer and
9 collaborate with MOVA, who works with agency liaisons
10 to resolve issues and make referrals as needed in
11 support of veterans who are not city employees, and
12 who require assistance.

13 As noted above, the veteran liaisons are
14 primarily responsible for helping to support veterans
15 within their own agencies. For examples, the veteran
16 liaison at the Department of Investigation has
17 developed an effective program for supporting DOI's
18 veterans employees during deployments. Designated
19 DOI mentors and colleagues are assigned to maintain
20 regular email contact providing agency updates as
21 well as maintaining support for issues that
22 inevitably arise while deployed. This is but one of
23 many supportive actions that agency liaisons develop
24 and implement to support their veteran employees. To
25 better understand the interrelationship between MOVA

and agency liaisons across mayoral offices, departments and agencies, the following example may be useful. When a veteran staffer is activated on active duty for training or deployment, agency liaisons are responsible for verifying the employee's military orders. The liaison might call MOVA to assist with the verification of the actual order. MOVA then communicates with the Department of Defense, the services to confirm if the order is covered under a valid and current operation. If necessary, MOVA will also communicate with the actual military command in which the activated military member is assigned. Further, if the employee is away on a pre-approved training, and that training is extended or altered while the member is deployed, MOVA is frequently called upon to ensure that the veteran deployment status is accurately accounted for to protect the rights of veteran employees.

Veteran agency liaisons assist city employees within their agencies who also deploy as members of the Reserves and the National Guard. Specifically, agency liaisons are responsible for informing veteran employees about the city's Extended Military Benefits Program. As well as enforcing

2 compliance with the Federal Uniformed Services
3 Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act of 1994, also
4 known as USERRA, ensuring that military and veteran
5 employees receive all benefits and services to which
6 they are entitled. In performing t his first role,
7 supporting the veteran employees within their own
8 agencies, liaisons provide crucial assistance to
9 secure benefits, services and support. In fulfilling
10 their second role, supporting the non-city needs of
11 veterans employed by their respective agency, veteran
12 liaisons frequently consult with MOVA to determine
13 the best course of action for a given challenge.
14 MOVA is ideally suited for this role given extensive
15 knowledge base concerning local, state and federal
16 resources as well as MOVA's longstanding
17 relationships with veterans' service organizations
18 and others who serve the veterans community. For
19 example, if a veteran employee seeks help with using
20 the GI Bill, a situation, which requires additional
21 support and knowledge beyond the city services, the
22 agency liaison may contact MOVA for assistance. MOVA
23 will then typically research the case, advise the
24 veteran employee, intervene with the education system
25 if necessary, and provide direct support and follow

2 up with the liaison. Thus, agency liaisons in MOVA
3 work together as a team addressing whatever city
4 veteran employee issues or needs they are called upon
5 to support.

6 Regarding their third role, responding to
7 MOVA queries regarding the needs of veteran
8 constituents who are not city employees. Liaisons
9 are readily available for consultation to resolve
10 issues pertaining to the needs of constituent
11 veterans who contact MOVA for assistance. MOVA
12 fields a wide variety of constituent concerns on a
13 daily basis thanks to the dedicated service provided
14 by the--our own Laetitia Russo, Military Community
15 Liaison, and Inez Adon [sp?], Director of Human
16 Services. These two professionals are invaluable
17 resource whose knowledge is matched only by their
18 perspicacity and compassion. In reviewing their
19 respective caseloads, the top five constituent issues
20 are queries regarding city and federal benefits,
21 employment, housing and homelessness, education and
22 vendor space allocation and enforcement issues.

23 MOVA is also frequently contacted by
24 individuals seeking to gain eligibility criteria and
25 other information regarding the New York State

2 Property Tax Exemption to Veterans. In addition to
3 veterans, other eligible for this benefit include
4 military spouses, or un-remarried widows, widowers of
5 veterans or Gold Star parents, the part of a child
6 who died in the line of duty. Administered locally
7 by the Department of Finance at New York City, this
8 exemption varies according to era of service,
9 deployment in a combat zone, and disability status.
10 MOVA assists veterans in compiling their military
11 records required to establish eligibility. Which in
12 some cases involves replacement of military records.
13 And MOVA consults regularly with the Department of
14 Finance's agency liaison. Working together again as
15 a team, MOVA's veteran experts and the Department of
16 Finance's veteran liaison assist veterans by
17 providing information related to filing for the
18 exemption, checking their filing status, addressing
19 their concerns and providing additional resources, if
20 needed.

21 MOVA also works closely with the
22 Department of Homeless Services, with NYCHA, with HPD
23 liaisons to resolve issues related to housing
24 placement vouchers and referrals, pending evictions,
25 utilities arrears and other concerns related to

2 veteran housing. For example, the DHS liaison
3 testified with MOVA last fall, and he has continued
4 to play a vital role in fulfilling Mayor de Blasio's
5 pledge to end veteran homelessness. Actions
6 supporting the Mayor's pledge range from senior
7 leadership weekly strategic meetings hosted by the
8 First Deputy Mayor. Weekly case management and task
9 force meetings to coordinate actions across city
10 agencies, the VA and service providers. And close
11 collaboration between the Commissioners of DHS,
12 NYCHA, HPD, HRA and MOVA.

13 MOVA provides support that applies to all
14 agencies, hosting an annual training session for
15 veteran liaisons. This two-hour training was last
16 held in February of 2014. To date, this training
17 provided by the New York State Department of Labor
18 has focused on USERRA legal requirements, providing a
19 form for addressing updates and issues. MOVA has
20 expanded this training in 2015 to include working as
21 a collective group to share agency specific ideas and
22 practices to inform strategies related to employee
23 veteran support and veteran recruitment to join the
24 New York City workforce. Update agency liaisons on
25 MOVA's key strategic imperatives, and to provide

2 direct veteran community resource support as needed.
3 This training session is a follow-up to the
4 individual communication MOVA has with agency
5 liaisons in the group teleconference outreach
6 sessions both of which precede the in-person annual
7 training.

8 The annual face-to-face training gives
9 agency liaisons an opportunity to identify and share
10 citywide resources, which could be of benefit to
11 veterans. The next veteran liaison session increased
12 to three hours this year is scheduled in May 2015.
13 MOVA will provide a commissioner update on MOVA top
14 tier strategic priorities, and will focus the veteran
15 liaisons on identifying New York City services and
16 resources provided by their respective agency to
17 facilitate access to resources and services to
18 veterans and their families. This information will
19 inform MOVA upcoming initiatives and will be featured
20 on MOVA's website. MOVA is broadening and deepening
21 its relationships with city agency veteran liaisons,
22 whose role we regard and value greatly as a strategic
23 force multiplier. Accordingly, we are proactively
24 engaging with the liaisons to identify current and
25 emergency agency programs, and resources, which would

2 be of interest to veterans and their families as well
3 as best practices for supporting existing city
4 employees who are veterans and/or members of the
5 Reserves and National Guard.

6 In closing, MOVA will continue to work
7 closely with agency liaisons to find solutions for
8 veteran employees and their families as well as to
9 ensure that veteran employees receive all benefits,
10 services and entitlements pertaining to their service
11 status. Agency liaisons and veterans who are
12 employed by the City of New York assist MOVA in
13 determining needs so that it can better serve all
14 veterans and their families who live and work in New
15 York City. Thank you again for your interest in this
16 important area. I look forward now to your comments,
17 ideas, thoughts and questions. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much,
19 Commissioner Sutton for your testimony. Thank you
20 for being here as always. I think you come to every
21 hearing, and we certainly appreciate that because
22 quite frankly, you don't have to be here at every
23 hearing. And you come to some of the hearings that
24 you don't even have to come to. So we always
25 appreciate that. I have a few questions, and then

2 I'll ask some of my colleagues if they have anything
3 that they would like to add. You mentioned the
4 upcoming training session. Other than the veteran
5 liaisons, are you inviting any of the other folks
6 from the Administration or any other particular
7 agencies to come and give presentations? For
8 instance, you mentioned the property tax exemption.
9 Will there be someone there from the Department of
10 Finance to explain what it is, and how veterans can
11 apply for it, and how--who's eligible and who's not
12 eligible? You know, are you going to take that all
13 on yourself? I mean it seems like a lot that you
14 would have to do.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Oh, well,
16 fortunately, Mr. Chairman, that's precisely the kind
17 of expertise the liaisons themselves bring to
18 trainings. So the Department of Finance liaison will
19 be there at the training.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] All
21 right.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Will be able to
23 address any questions that folks may have. In fact,
24 we're really pleased today. We've got a couple of
25 our veteran liaisons. We've got Tom Walsh from FDNY

2 as well as Nick Sperdone--Spordom--Sperdone [sp?]
3 from--from DOITT, and, you know, if you have any
4 particular questions about veteran agency liaison
5 roles, certainly either of these gentlemen can help
6 you out with that as well, but--

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] That's
8 great.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --the short answer
10 to your question is we'll have the expertise that
11 those liaisons bring in combination with MOVA
12 staffing expertise. We will bring in the Department
13 of State--the Department of Labor on the state level,
14 and they provide the latest updates on the USERRA
15 legislation. But we broadened it this year so that
16 we can include other interagency issues.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So--so the liaisons
18 so a lot of their work is focused on helping veterans
19 that work within the respective agencies, or working
20 for other city agencies that call for clarification
21 or information.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Right.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But they also have a
24 responsibility to serve members of the public who

2 call and say, Hey, I'm a veteran, and I want to apply
3 for preference in Mitchell-Lama housing or HPD--

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]

5 Sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --and they might get
7 in touch with-- One of the--one of the ideas that I
8 had, and it's up to the Administration, perhaps this
9 should be opened up to include representatives from
10 each of the five borough presidents just to attend.
11 I know that Melinda Katz has brought this veterans
12 liaison Dan Brown, and Dan goes to just as many
13 meetings as you and I. And, a lot of times
14 constituents call. If they don't call my office,
15 they might call the borough president of Queens or
16 Staten Island or Manhattan asking for information.
17 And they don't have access all of the information
18 because they might not know which liaisons exist and
19 where and what they do. So not to participate in a
20 way that they, you know, get to take over the agenda
21 and ask questions. But maybe just inviting them or
22 their representative to attend. It's just an idea
23 only because they're--they--they receive complaints
24 and increase from the public, too.

25

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. You know, we
3 can certainly take that under consideration. I would
4 say that this perhaps is a good chance to clarify how
5 this information will work. For example, Dan Brown.
6 We work closely with Dan at the Queens Borough
7 President's Office. If he's got a problem or an
8 issue that a constituent has raised in Queens, he's
9 not going to call that agency liaison directly. He's
10 going to call MOVA, and then that's what we do. Is
11 we do the work across the city agency so our
12 relationship is with the liaison. So that we can
13 then resolve the issue, get the information, close
14 the loop. I would say that a good opportunity,
15 whether it be Dan Brown or any one in the five
16 respective boroughs. Now that we have the Veterans
17 Advisory Board that will be meeting regularly, you
18 know, once in each borough throughout the course of
19 the year. That would be a great opportunity for the
20 borough president's staff or anyone else in that
21 borough to be able to come forward and be part of
22 that public meeting.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So what--the last
24 question and I know Vallone and Cohen might have a
25 question. But, what type of outreach does MOVA do to

2 veterans who work with city agencies to let them know
3 that hey this liaison exists. This is the person
4 you--if you--you can--if you work with HRA and you're
5 a veteran and you have a question, you can contact
6 this particular person. What type of outreach? Who
7 does that business? Does MOVA have to do that
8 outreach, or does the--

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] No.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --individual liaison
11 do outreach within the agency. I don't know.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, the--the
13 individual agency liaisons that's their primarily
14 responsibility. And for--for example in the case of
15 FDNY, you know, Tom he gets weekly bulletins that are
16 published throughout FDNY who has, you know, a
17 number, you know, hundreds of--of service members
18 some of whom are deployed. Others who are veterans.
19 Others members of the National Guard or the Reserves.
20 So it's a regular ongoing communication. Very, very
21 rarely MOVA will be contacted by someone, a veteran
22 in an agency who--who doesn't know about the agency
23 liaison and has question. In which case we just, you
24 know, help them understand who they connect to, and
25 make sure that they get that follow up. But it's the

2 agency liaisons themselves within each respective
3 agency that really reach out across their agencies to
4 connect with their veteran employees.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I--I think that's
6 very important because there are veterans who work
7 for the City of New York in a particular agency, and
8 they--they may not be aware that that person is even
9 there to help them, and they are.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Exactly.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It could be someone
12 that works in their building three floors above them
13 or--

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
15 Exactly.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --you know, in some
17 other part of the city. So that's really important.
18 I know there are other committees. So I want to ask
19 my colleagues if they have any questions. Let's
20 start to my immediate right here. Council Member
21 Vallone.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair
23 Ulrich. Good afternoon, Commissioner. Good to see
24 you again.

25 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Indeed.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I love the
3 liaisons. I know we--we are using them very
4 successfully locally, and it's--it's a way for us to
5 get to places that we all can't be at, at the same
6 time. So I just--just following up on that on the
7 Chair's questions and your testimony.

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-
9 huh.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Who actually
11 chooses the liaisons? Is it the agency or is it
12 yourself or--?

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Oh, no. The agency
14 heads. So every quarter, we take the roster and we
15 scrub it because, of course, people come and go, and
16 then we notify the agencies. So this month has been
17 the month starting the second quarter where we've
18 done that scrub. And, the agency heads are the ones
19 who are responsible. What we do is we refer them,
20 you know, provide access to the actual Local Law 42
21 so they can see really what's in writing. But
22 practically speaking, we let them know that what's
23 worked best--best across the agencies has been for
24 the liaison to be someone who, you know, has
25 managerial stature and responsibilities. Someone who

2 is senior enough so that when we reach out to them,
3 they can reach across at any level in the
4 organization, the agency to resolve issues or to get
5 information on a timely basis. But the--the--the

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] So
7 when a call--

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --agency head.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So when the call
10 comes into that particular--I guess it's the Fire
11 Department, does it just stay internally within the
12 liaison, or does that automatically coordinate with
13 your office?

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: When a call comes
15 I'm sure--let me--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
17 Say there's a veteran on the Fire Department has a
18 call--

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-
20 huh.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --and they reach
22 out to their liaison--

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-
24 huh.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --are--are you
3 aware of that?

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, that--unless
5 the liaison needs some help, in which case the
6 liaison contacts MOVA. But most of the time, the--
7 the veteran agency liaisons they've got everything
8 they need to resolve the issue within the agency if
9 it's an agency specific--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
11 But maybe by the way that we could expand that, it
12 would be great information I would think if I was in
13 your shoes to--to know the type of requests that are
14 coming in--

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Oh,
16 we--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --to my agency
18 so that data is presented to you, and then you could
19 probably more quickly relate whether it's with the
20 board or at the end of the year some of the concerns
21 on that quarter or annual basis of the top five calls
22 that are coming in. Just kind of like you report to
23 us here. That might be additional information that
24 would be pretty helpful.

25

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. I mean I--I
3 gave you the top five constituent issues that MOVA
4 deals with and reaches out regularly to contact the
5 liaisons concerning. Also, we've got--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] So
7 that top five, and thank you--you mentioned the two--
8 the two--

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Okay.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --people that
11 were helping. Those are the five that the Chair and
12 I, I guess we hear all the time, too. We--City and
13 federal benefits; housing and homelessness;
14 education, vendor space allocation; and, of course,
15 enforcement issues.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
17 Sure.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, now that
19 that's been presented, what's next? What would be
20 the plan, and I see that they're there, but I guess
21 of that is there any additional programming or
22 efforts to address those top five.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, my guidance
24 to our MOVA staff is that their job is to find a way
25 to yes. In other words, to resolve an issue or a

2 concern or a question that comes up. And--and if
3 they have completely exhausted their own knowledge
4 base, their resources. They've gone to the agency
5 liaison and question them, and there's an issue
6 they'll come back to me and Catherine LaPorte, who's
7 our Chief of Staff. And then we'll take it from
8 there if there's anything else that needs to be done.
9 That's a very rare situation, I would say, but that's
10 my guidance to our--to our staff. So these just
11 happen to be the common issues. I also the issues,
12 the top issues for us contacting liaisons, and the
13 top issues for liaisons contacting MOVA. We'll be
14 sharing this information at the training in May. And
15 we'll be consulting with the liaisons to really make
16 sure that we are addressing their needs. And, that
17 we can really deepen and broaden this collaboration
18 as I mentioned in my testimony.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You know, in
20 following the idea on the liaisons providing you the
21 information--

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-
23 huh.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --are the city
25 agencies required to report to you on a quarterly or

2 annual basis just the matter of veteran cases that
3 come before them?

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There is no
5 reporting requirement.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Nobody reports
7 that. [sic] I think that's critical information to
8 find out. I think that goes back to the original
9 bill that we would--we happily put in last month to
10 get some of that information. I think that would be
11 a great way to address whether it's at DHS, NYCHA,
12 HPD, FDNY, NYPD what is happening in our veteran's
13 lives that is requiring agencies to provide that
14 information, and present that data to you and to us
15 so that we can actually see what's happening there.
16 I think that's important.

17 The last thing I would do is--is mention
18 the--you have the Mental Behavioral Health for Vets
19 working with Chirlane McCray, and that there's
20 holistic programs and veterans working with a number
21 of agencies to facilitate cultural transformation.
22 Just can you expand on that a little bit? Because
23 that's such a critical area. I'm not quite sure what
24 we're addressing there.

25

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, the First
3 Lady and her team she's really taken on this issue of
4 mental health as her particular area of focus. And
5 so, she is working. As you may have seen in some of
6 the press coverage, she's gone across city government
7 touring agencies, going to programs throughout the
8 city consulting with experts more broadly. And this
9 summer we'll be coming up with a strategy road map.
10 She's adopting a public health orientation, and
11 really looking at what ways in the community with
12 peer based and holistic approaches that can empower
13 individuals and families and communities to build
14 those bonds of trust that will then allow them if
15 they should need further care within a clinic or in a
16 hospital. But then they have the--the sort of human
17 capital, the relationships that bridge to those kinds
18 of services. So, you'll be hearing more about that
19 from her. I know that just--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
21 And that have a veterans component to it, too because
22 I--

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, and so clearly
24 we're very excited about incorporating the needs of
25 veterans and their families within that strategy road

2 map. So we had a chance to take the First Lady and
3 her--her team on a two-day sampler tour here in New
4 York City, and the-- You know we went to a variety
5 of programs. We had a round table with 13 veteran
6 service organizations who are working in this space.
7 Everything from the Mission Continues to Iraq and
8 Afghanistan Veterans of America, to Exit 12, which is
9 a ballet dance company that young Marine has stood
10 up. A number of different programs that she had a
11 chance to learn more about. We also went to the VA's
12 Music and Animal Therapy Program.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So this is--is
14 it working with the actual--

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
16 Absolutely.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --advocates and
18 the groups themselves. So this input is coming in
19 from the groups?

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. She is
21 taking a hands-on approach to learning about what's
22 going on throughout the community. And, of course,
23 our specific interest for MOVA's perspective is--is
24 we're delighted with her focus in this area. And we
25 are absolutely committed to incorporating veterans

2 and their families within that strategy. And she's
3 been more than gracious and accepting and excited
4 about this opportunity. So, we're very--we're very
5 pleased.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: As always, thank
7 you to our Commissioner, doctor and colonel and
8 general and every other title that you have. But
9 it's just nice to talk to you. [sic]

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you so much,
11 Council Member Vallone.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Council Member
13 Cohen.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you Chair
15 and good afternoon General. How are you?

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Doing well.
17 Thanks.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Excellent. I just
19 have one question as sort of a follow up on Council
20 Member Vallone's question regarding reporting. Do we
21 know about compliance with the law. How many--
22 [coughs] Of all agencies, how many have--have
23 designated that you're aware of the liaisons?

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah, so--so, it's
25 just something we're working on right now because

2 when we started this month's quarterly scrub we had
3 fully seven agencies that were listed, and we had,
4 you know, the usual about 10% of so flux in terms of
5 needing to follow up, and make sure we get those
6 agency spots filled. But then we took a--a broader
7 look, and we've--we've subsequently added about
8 another 10 or 11. In fact, as of this afternoon,
9 talking to you, Seth, who informed me that he's the
10 agency liaison for the City Council. So you, Seth,
11 you're being added to this number now. So, we've got
12 about 58 that are identified. And right now we're
13 just in the process of getting the last three or four
14 of them filled. Then those will be posted up as our
15 updated roster on the website.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Yep, that would be
17 great. I think we're looking forward to seeing that.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Terrific. All
19 right.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you so much.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much.

23 My former chief of staff Rudy informed me today that
24 he's the veterans liaisons for Build It Back.

25 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Oh. [laughs]

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So I'm sure that
3 he's already on your list. I don't know if that was
4 strategic or truly coincidental. Anyway, just two
5 follow-up questions. Council Member Vallone--this is
6 not the topic of the hearing today, but it did come
7 up in your testimony--submitted a bill last year to
8 include in the New York City ID Card a veterans
9 designation.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-huh.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And we did not act
12 on that because we were told by the administration at
13 the time that they were working it, and they were
14 rolling out NYCID in several phases. Do you happen
15 to have an update or know anything about the status
16 of it that you'd be able to share with us today or--?

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure, we're working
18 on that right now. We think it's a great idea.
19 We're excited about it. We're reaching out. In
20 fact, if you've got some ideas in terms of the--the
21 incentives that apply specifically to veterans. I
22 mean the package as it--as it is, and I would just
23 say this to any of us here today. If you haven't
24 checked out IDNYC, do it. I mean the cultural
25 attractions you can get free. Membership for you and

2 your family for a year. There's all kinds of things
3 that--that come with that municipal ID. And there's
4 already been more people in New York City who have
5 received and who have received their municipal ID
6 than all the other cities combined that have been
7 doing this for years. So, of course, we want
8 veterans to have a veteran designator--

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing]
10 Actually, we're looking forward to it. Thank you for
11 that.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And so, you will
13 hear more about that, but yeah, we're all over.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, no, we're--
15 we're glad because there's--there's certain things we
16 don't have to legislate the Administration can and is
17 doing on their own. And that's--that's good. We
18 want to roll that out. The Governor, Governor Cuomo
19 allows veterans to have a designation on their
20 driver's license--

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yep.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --their State issued
23 ID, and Council Member Vallone said we should do the
24 same for NYC. I did before it was even rolled out.
25 So, you know--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]

3 Thank you, Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --it's just--I know
5 it's important to him, and again it's kind of off--
6 off topic here.

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We're very excited
8 about that. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You brought up best
10 practices that agency liaisons would share with each
11 other. Do you have an example or any instance that
12 you can--you know, that you might be able to call to
13 mind? Or, maybe you have to wait until after the
14 meeting on May 15th. But I'm sure that people that
15 work in agencies have an idea of what works and what
16 doesn't work. And some of them might have ideas from
17 proving delivery of services or how they're serving
18 veterans within their agency or in other agencies.
19 So, has anything come from these liaisons? Have they
20 kicked up any interesting ideas or recommendations
21 that the Administration is looking at as a result of
22 having the liaisons?

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, you know, in
24 our teleconferences, in our conversations we've
25 talked in general terms. We look forward at the

2 annual training to really digging down and getting
3 that information, those best practices and ideas that
4 will emerge in that training. So we'll be glad to--
5 to share those.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And second and
7 lastly. I promise no more after this, you mentioned
8 the follow from DOITT was here, the liaison.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Nick Sbordone?

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes, thanks. First
11 of all, thank you for being here. I know you're very
12 busy and the members should understand that to that
13 in addition to being the veterans liaison, they also
14 have a job to do day-to-day.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But that's not their
17 full-time job responsibility. That's kind of
18 something that they--that they volunteered. They
19 don't get paid anything extra to act in that role.
20 But they're serving in that position for an important
21 reason. We also had a bill in the Council that would
22 connect veterans who are suicidal to the--the
23 lifeline, the crisis--

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-
25 huh.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --Veterans Crisis
3 Line. That was something that I think that we had
4 spoken about. Something that the Administration
5 again can do on its own. It's not something the
6 Council has to necessarily legislate. But something
7 that perhaps DOITT should talk about internally. You
8 know, if--

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --you've had those
11 conversations already great.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And actually we
13 have--

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Oh,
15 great.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --and we are
17 pursuing that. In fact, Nick--Nicholas and I just
18 had a conversation on that recently, and we're-- You
19 know, we think that this is something that for anyone
20 who's in distress, who's in crisis whether they be a
21 veteran

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [off mic] Right.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --or a resident of
24 New York City, they ought to be reliably referred to

2 a quality crisis line. Unfortunately, we do have
3 such a national quality crisis line.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, and they do
5 phenomenal work the VCL.

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And that was
8 actually a policy recommendation that came out of
9 IAVA, and we were happy to introduce it, but it
10 doesn't have to come from us. It's something that,
11 again, if the--if the Administration or a particular
12 agency wants to do it, whoever gets it done first,
13 God bless, we need it.

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
15 Listen, we're all in this together, Mr. Chairman so--

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We're all in this
17 together. We all want to reduce veteran's
18 homelessness and suicide rates and help veterans and
19 their families navigate. You know, cut through the
20 red tape. It's something that I think we share and--
21 and we're all committed to doing. So I want to thank
22 you again for being here--

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Thank
24 you so much.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --as always, and
3 we're going to hear from some of the folks and the
4 advocates who have come to testify. Thank you
5 Commissioner Sutton. Thank you. Our first panel, we
6 have four. There are four chairs. That's good. Dan
7 McSweeney representing United War Vets Council; Rob
8 Pashoda, SBDC Brooklyn; Kristen Rouse, New York City
9 Veterans Alliance; and Coco Culhane representing the
10 Veterans Advocacy group that's formed from the Urban
11 Justice Center. And what we will do is give four
12 minutes each for the testimony for each of you, and
13 just give us a few minutes while the Sergeant-At-Arms
14 hands out the testimonies, and then we'll start the
15 clock. And we'll start with Coco. Ladies first.
16 Right to left, my right and your left. Four minutes.
17 We'll go four minutes because we don't have a heck of
18 a lot of people that signed up, and we don't want to
19 rush you. Your testimony is very important, too.
20 I'll ask the Committee Counsel to swear in the panel.

21 [pause]

22 LEGAL COUNSEL: Can you raise your right
23 hand, please. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
24 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your

25

2 testimony before this committee, and to respond
3 honestly to council member questions?

4 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much.
6 Coco, let's start with you.

7 COCO CULHANE: Hi, Coco Culhane from
8 Veteran Advocacy Project. I will keep this very
9 brief because I didn't think that his was really our
10 territory. But it's not clear to me that the law
11 says that the liaisons are supposed to respond to
12 veterans in the public. So I found this a little bit
13 confusing actually. And when the announcement of
14 this hearing came, I asked my staff what their
15 experience with liaisons was. And all of the
16 responses from various advocates and attorneys said
17 that they had never gotten a call returned. And, in
18 fact, one of our attorneys said that she has sent
19 emails to two different agencies, which read receipt-
20 -a receipt request. And that each time she has
21 gotten a message back that says her emails were
22 deleted without ever being opened. So, I just think
23 that it may be that these liaisons are not supposed
24 to be answering certainly to an advocacy group. But
25 just in hearing the initial conversation here today,

2 it seems to me unclear what exactly their role is.
3 And that seems like something that should be cleared up,
4 and then pass it onto people.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, I--before we
6 move on, I think that offline you should share the
7 information with Commissioner Sutton because I'm sure
8 that she'd want to know, you know, more specifics
9 regarding what the issue was, which agency we're
10 dealing with and-- Oh.

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] Can I
12 answer?

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, please. Yeah,
14 go ahead.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] Well, if
16 you can contact us [on mic] and we do work with you
17 all the time definitely.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Yeah.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I just think
20 clarity is-- [off mic] Just on the issue of someone
21 seeking the liaison. [sic] So I think it's
22 important to clarify that agency and just for those
23 three reasons that I outlined in my testimony. So,
24 yeah. I appreciate this opportunity to clarify.

25 [pause]

2 COCO CULHANE: So it does need to go
3 through MOVA?

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] Yes.

5 COCO CULHANE: They're not there for
6 public veterans?

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] Yes,
8 that's it exactly, and I'm sorry for that confusion.

9 COCO CULHANE: Right. I'm glad we're
10 clarifying it. Thanks.

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Great.

12 COCO CULHANE: No problem.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's great and
14 that's an important point, too, regarding how the law
15 is written and how people understand the law. So
16 maybe we'll talk off line with our committee counsel
17 and some of the attorneys and the Administration to
18 see if there's something that can be done to kind of
19 make that clearer. If that's the mission and the
20 role of the liaisons, we don't want to mislead
21 anybody.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Right.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You know, even
24 members of the public who are veterans and have
25 legitimate questions, we don't want them to feel like

2 they've been, you know, let down in any way. So,
3 we'll talk offline about that. Kristen is next.

4 KRISTEN ROUSE: Good afternoon,
5 Councilman Ulrich--

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Thank
7 you.

8 KRISTEN ROUSE: --Commissioner and
9 everyone in the room. Again, just to reinforce Coco's
10 point, I do want to state that--that what I found
11 available online to explain the agency liaisons,
12 again was directed at employment, and I'm going to
13 speak to that rather than the public office. [sic]
14 So that's again to reinforce my understanding of it
15 as well. Good afternoon. My name is Kristen Rouse
16 and I'm speaking on behalf of the New York City
17 Veterans Alliance. I'm a veteran of the United
18 States Army, and I served three tours of duty in
19 Afghanistan. I was employed by New York City
20 Government for nearly six years, a period of time
21 that included two of my deployments to Afghanistan as
22 a member of the National Guard. As a former city
23 employee, I found the city to be a good employer for
24 veterans and military reservists. But it is also
25 important to note the areas where the city can and

2 must do better for its veteran and military
3 employees. New York City government is the largest
4 employer in New York City, and it is also the largest
5 employer of veterans in New York City.

6 If New York City government committed
7 itself to also being the best employer of veterans in
8 the city, it would have a tremendous impact on the
9 lives of a significant number of veterans. New York
10 City government can and should be a model for other
11 employers to follow when it comes to ensuring
12 veterans and military reservists receive the full
13 protections and benefits afforded by federal, state
14 and city laws. It should also make--it should also
15 make veterans and military reservists feel that their
16 service and experience are valued assets in city
17 employment. City agencies are required-- Going back
18 to Mayor Bloomberg's executive order in 2008 and
19 previous state legislation, city agencies are
20 required to have both a veterans liaison and a
21 military liaison to advise veterans and military
22 reservists on the benefits and services available for
23 them. As well as to provide a channel of
24 communication between veteran employees and for the

2 Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. These are
3 critical functions.

4 Most, if not all, of these liaisons work
5 in the human resources departments of their
6 respective agencies. But the veterans liaison and
7 military liaison are not necessarily the same person
8 even though a large number of employees are both
9 veterans in military reservists. And even though the
10 Federal Uniformed Services Employment Rights and Re-
11 Employment Act, also known as USERRA, contains
12 important protections for both veterans and military
13 reservists. When I first started employment a New
14 York City agency in June 2008, when the agency
15 liaisons were a new thing, I found that my military
16 experience was indeed valued by the supervisor who
17 hired me. And I felt welcomed to transfer the skill
18 I learned--the skills I learned in the military
19 toward my civilian employment with the City. My
20 agency's human resources director thanked me for my
21 service, and she also informed me that as a military
22 reservist, I was entitled to 30 days of military
23 leave if I needed it. And she also explained to me
24 that if I had any extended absence for military duty,
25 such as a deployment, I would still accrue regular

2 leave days, and retain my health and retirement
3 savings benefits while I was away.

4 These were great benefits that made me
5 feel supported in my part-time military service.
6 Also, early on in my employment, my agency's
7 commissioner told me personally that he believed
8 veterans and reservists make great employees. And
9 that he appreciated my service. All of this was very
10 important, and very personal to me, and I firmly
11 believe this represents the best of what cit service
12 can offer veterans and military reservists. I was
13 not aware, however, that my human resources director
14 was also appointed specifically as my agency's
15 veterans liaison. Or, that another member of my
16 agency's Human Resources Department was appointed as
17 my agency's military liaison. Or, that I should go
18 to them with other issues related to my veterans
19 status or military service. Following my first year
20 of employment with the City, I deployed to
21 Afghanistan with the National Guard. My commissioner
22 was very supportive as was my human resources
23 director and many of my co-workers, too.

24 I spent nine months deployed in a forward
25 area in Afghanistan's eastern mountains, and it was a

2 very tough tour for me. I was glad to come home to a
3 job that was familiar--that was familiar, and where I
4 could fit back in with my team, and I loved my
5 service to the City. But, within two or three months
6 following my return [bell] two of my colleagues were
7 promoted into positions over me. One of whom started
8 employment the same month as I did. Even though my
9 supervisors were fully informed that my work in
10 Afghanistan in many ways advanced by civilian work
11 skills and related to my work for the city, I was
12 told that my colleagues were being rewarded for the
13 work that they did during my absence. And that I
14 would be evaluated on the work I did when I was
15 present. Only years later did I actually understand
16 USERRA laws to realize that it was a violation of
17 federal law to deny me the promotion, seniority,
18 status and pay increase that I would have received
19 had I not been away for military duty.

20 And still performing at the high level
21 reflected at my annual employment evaluations. In
22 the years that followed, I found that my direct
23 supervisor could be difficult about my military
24 absence despite my giving him advance notice. And I
25 continued on for nearly five years without a

1 promotion or pay increase. Despite my consistently
2 positive performance evaluations, I was told that it
3 was because I had not been present to perform at the
4 same level as my peers who were being promoted and--
5 who were being promoted and given raises. My
6 agency's veterans liaison was always friendly to me,
7 and she always forwarded me flyers from MOVA
8 announcing career fairs and commemorative events.
9 All the while I never fully understood the
10 protections I was entitled to under USERRA, and I
11 grew upset and discontented working at my agency.
12 Because I felt that I was being penalized for being
13 absent from City service because I had been present
14 for military service during a time of war.

15
16 New York City government can and must do
17 better than this, and there are now cost and no cost
18 ways to make sure that no veteran or military
19 reservist ever feels that their service isn't valued
20 or that they're being left behind. Or, that they're
21 otherwise being penalized or discrimination against
22 for their military service. To this end, we offer
23 the following recommendations:

24 1. New York City government should
25 enact a veteran's hiring preference similar to

1 existing federal and state hiring preferences for all
2 city government positions in recognition of honorable
3 military service. And, to reinforce the value across
4 city government that veterans and military reservists
5 make good employees.
6

7 2. New York City government should
8 ensure that all agency human resources personnel, not
9 just a single veterans liaison or military liaison at
10 each agency, are fully trained on USERRA protections
11 for veterans and military reservists. And that human
12 resources departments educate agency personnel,
13 supervisors, veterans and military reservists alike
14 on these basic protections as part of annual training
15 requirements similar to the annual requirements for
16 sexual harassment prevention and conflict of interest
17 training.

18 3. New York City government should
19 provide an informational brochure or packet both in
20 print and online for veterans and military reservists
21 employed by the city to notify them of the employment
22 protections, benefits and services available to them.
23 Currently, they may not even be aware that their
24 agency has an appointed veterans liaison or military
25 liaison specifically to consult with them on these

2 matters. If New York City government officials say
3 they prioritize employment for veterans, they must
4 first set the example by making New York government
5 the best employer of veterans and military reservists
6 that it can be. Agency liaisons play a critical
7 role, but are just one component of this larger goal.

8 I also wish to state for the record our
9 support for a bill to establish a Department of
10 Veterans Affairs that could be--better facilitate and
11 resource the recommendations made here. I would like
12 to inquire of the committee of the status of where
13 that bill currently is. Pending your further, your
14 questions and further comments, this concludes my
15 testimony.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for
17 sharing your personal story. A very powerful
18 testimony. My idea that I had regarding some of your
19 testimony, and sometimes the best ideas come out of
20 testimony that we receive here. I just got a visit
21 the other day in my office from a constituent who's
22 applying for a 911 dispatcher job. She's not a
23 veteran, but it's interesting because it could apply
24 to veterans and people who are activated and go into
25 military service The civil service code has very

2 strict timing regulations regarding answering medical
3 waivers, or answering questions that investigators
4 might have for a particular agency. And I hope that
5 there's something in the works or in the mechanism so
6 that if a vet--if someone has only days to respond,
7 and that they get put on active military duty, that
8 they are not automatically disqualified because of
9 the--because of what the Civil Service Code says.
10 This constituent that I have had--she had 30 days to
11 get a notarized statement from her doctor claiming
12 that she's on pain medication. It's prescribed for
13 certain reasons. I would had to think that if there
14 was a veteran who was--who was and--and scored very
15 well on a test and wanted to get a city job, you
16 know, that somehow wasn't home to check the mail
17 because he had to go--he or she had to go to
18 training. And the deadline passed, that they would
19 be penalized for that. So maybe the time. We should
20 talk offline, but maybe the time that they are
21 activated or go on active duty, you know, could be
22 added to that time frame. I don't know. That might
23 be something legislative, or something the
24 administration can do. But, we certainly don't want
25 somebody who goes into military service because

2 they're called upon to be penalized or get, you know,
3 shafted out of a job that they've been waiting a year
4 and a half for. That they really, you know, have
5 been working towards getting. So that's great.

6 The latter point is not the--the topic of
7 today's hearing. I will say just to address it, it's
8 a negotiation that we're engaged with the
9 Administration. It's an ongoing conversation that
10 we're having. There is a tremendous amount of
11 support in the Council to establish an independent
12 city agency to serve veterans. We're going to
13 continue negotiations. If negotiations don't work,
14 you know, I haven't ruled out discharging the bill.
15 But that is not the route that we want to take. We
16 want to work with the Administration to really
17 continue that dialogue and--and try to get to an
18 outcome that everybody can support. So that's--
19 that's what I wanted to say on the MOVA bill. So
20 hopefully, that will kind of put it to bed for now.
21 But it is a--rest assured, it is a conversation that
22 the folks in the Council are having with the
23 Administration. So why don't we move onto--who else
24 do we have.

2 RALPH PIECHOTA: You have--I am. Ralph
3 Piechota. I am the Director of the Small Business
4 Development Center in Brooklyn. I'm going to talk
5 about your court, Mr. Council. I'm prepared to talk
6 about the SUNY and CUNY issue, but I want to
7 reference real quick about the liaison issue. We're
8 not a city organization, but just for everyone's
9 information, when I have an issue or a question I
10 cannot answer the first office will call is MOVA. I
11 think all of the information has to go through that
12 office. Quite often issues regarding employment or
13 self-employment rather and small business, that's
14 probably not their area of expertise. But they need
15 to know the answer that I find out, and I try to keep
16 them in the loop and with the new folks over there, I
17 will continue to do so. I think it's in everybody's
18 best interest that they be the sort of focal point.
19 And so far it's been--it's been fantastic. Do you
20 want to hear about my comments for SUNY and CUNY?

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You have four
22 minutes to talk about whatever it is your heart
23 desires.

24

25

2 RALPH PIECHOTA: I've been sitting here
3 four minutes and Kris has got me motivated. So I'll
4 tell you what, she's got a heck of a story.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Kristen got eight
6 minutes.

7 RALPH PIECHOTA: Well, she--she deserved
8 it.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's not your fault.
10 So we're giving you another--

11 RALPH PIECHOTA: Anyway, thank you,
12 Chair. Real briefly.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'm just kidding.
14 I'm just kidding.

15 RALPH PIECHOTA: Thank you, Chair Ulrich
16 and the members of the Veterans Council. Your
17 concern on such matters as the SUNY and CUNY issue is
18 very noble and good for the city. It should be
19 leading the nation in the initiatives that
20 meaningfully celebrate the men and women that have
21 defended our nation against all enemies foreign and
22 domestic. While we do a wonderful job in New York
23 City validating our veterans with parades,
24 proclamations and photo ops, the thrust of committees
25 such as this with out-of-the-box thinking and common

2 sense will no doubt lead to meaningful policy changes
3 and processes that aid the New York City veteran
4 population and their families. However, overcoming
5 an urge [sic] is not easy, and I'm here to add just
6 one small voice to the growing chorus of veteran
7 advocacy in meaningful and life changing ways. It is
8 my hope that New York City and New York State will
9 again become places where veterans will want to
10 transition out of the military to and not from.

11 I offer my testimony in part because I'm
12 a veteran myself, and as many veteran advocates in
13 the city. As the Director of the Small Business
14 Development Center, I cannot offer ironclad metrics
15 to prove that military experience should be rewarded
16 by academic credits at the college level. I can
17 offer reasons that justifies significant credit be
18 given for documented military service. From the
19 perspective of one who provides technical assistance
20 to aspiring and existing businesses, the business
21 owners, approximately 25% of the assistance that we
22 provide comes in the way of education at some type.
23 Most clients of small business development centers
24 around the city, and there are eight of us, are
25 seeking or need help in one of four major areas. It

2 might be business concept, developmental--business
3 concept, customer relations, operations or
4 organization, which could also be leadership. Having
5 assisted veteran entrepreneurs over the past five
6 years, I can equivocally state that veterans display
7 superior skills when it comes to subsets of the four
8 categories above.

9 Thing like networking, sales and service,
10 communication, production and leadership. But
11 through formal Military Occupational Skill training
12 or MOS, leadership development training or collateral
13 socialite--socialization learning, veterans come to
14 the business world advanced in many key
15 characteristics that make them extremely effective as
16 business owners. Many of the same skills that are
17 making them very effective business employees. As an
18 SBDC--as an SBDC director, my staff does not have to
19 spend as much time helping, which--helping these
20 skills sets such as those mentioned above in order to
21 move the novice or traditional entrepreneur from
22 baseline to goal. It's not a stretch to believe the
23 same is true of veterans returning to academic--
24 returning to academic pursuits following their
25 military commitments. Military experience gained

2 through the many phases of formal training and on-
3 the-job training cannot be ignored as a metric of
4 analytical and technical and soft skill learning.

5 How to measure and codify this learning
6 is beyond the scope of my testimony today. However,
7 it would be unwise to ignore the wisdom of assigning
8 credit to the knowledge base veterans brings to their
9 higher education pursuits. Any veteran with at least
10 two years of time in the military spent countless
11 hours in a classroom, or a formalized training
12 environment. With the upgrade of the line of
13 Military Occupation Specialty or MOSs and SQT numbers
14 [bell] to civilian ACE [sic] codes assigned the
15 proper credit to the appropriate curriculum credit
16 should be without challenge. You nailed it on page 4
17 I think of the Resolution. I mean it's a no-brainer.
18 I can't believe this is not standardize, and it
19 really should be. The fact that some other colleges
20 and universities get it is wonderful and hats off to
21 them. I come from New York College of Technology,
22 City Tech, and I think our folks did it over there.
23 City Tech was actually founded based on the folks
24 coming out of World War II, and that's where--how our
25 college got founded.

2 So, there are bits and pieces around the
3 city and the state that get it. I can't believe it's
4 not being done. I appreciate your foresight to
5 making this more of the standard than not. So those
6 are my comments. Thank you so much. And thank you
7 all for being here. Also, it's great seeing a full
8 room at these kind of events. It means that the
9 narrative is still pretty prevalent. So thank you
10 for your leadership.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Rob, and
12 don't thank me. Thank Council Member Maisel, who is
13 the prime co-sponsor of the bill. And as a former
14 teacher for many years, truly cares about not only
15 veterans but all people who are going through the
16 system. And making sure that they get the just, you
17 know, recognition for their life experiences and
18 particularly regarding military careers. It's
19 something that unfortunately the state has to do.
20 You know, the State Legislature has to pass it and
21 the Governor has to sign it. But, the Council was
22 committed very early on to taking a leading role in
23 being an advocate for veterans even on issues that we
24 have no control over. So this is just another
25 example of Councilman Maisel identifying a bill in

2 Albany, which would benefit veterans throughout the
3 state. And saying hey, we should take a stand on
4 this. So really I salute him because he's, you know,
5 he's so involved with so many issues. But he never
6 loses sight of the fact that his responsibilities as
7 a member of this committee is important, and
8 particularly related to helping student veterans. So
9 I thought it was great that we did that, and thank
10 you for your testimony. Why don't we move on to
11 last, but not least. Dan McSweeney.

12 DAN MCSWEENEY: Good afternoon, Chairman
13 Ulrich, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Dan
14 McSweeney. Thank you for the opportunity to speak
15 with you today. Please pardon my voice. I'm getting
16 over a cold. I am the income President of the United
17 War Veterans Council, a non-profit organization
18 dedicated to honoring and advocating fro all veterans
19 in New York. I can unreservedly offer the opinion
20 that veterans liaisons at City agencies has been a
21 vita initiative, the development of which was
22 informed by several basic realities. While our
23 community is still awaiting comprehensive assessments
24 of the impacts of this initiative, Commissioner
25 Sutton offered very solid examples of the impacts

2 already underway by veterans liaisons. The logic of
3 this legislation origins deserve to be underscored.
4 Veterans' needs are often different from those of
5 other New York residents on several fronts including
6 housing, healthcare, education, and support for
7 families. That's why having someone who speaks the
8 language of veterans is so important, and that is a
9 the heart of what liaisons offer. It's an important
10 example of government support at the local level for
11 this diverse community. That being said, veterans
12 are not looking for a handout from liaisons or
13 government in general. I believe our best advocates
14 firmly agree that what veterans want is a hand up.
15 So they can readjust to civilian life, and continue
16 serving in new ways. In that light, a good way to
17 frame this discussion is to understand that veterans
18 liaisons are helping to actualize the latent
19 potential of veterans in order to stimulate mutual
20 civil benefit. In my view, among the most effective
21 veterans liaisons would be veteran support officers,
22 many in my community have already been advocating for
23 at the borough level. Real support for this concept
24 would have exponential benefits for all New Yorkers.

2 Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much
5 for your testimony, and all of you, thank you very
6 much for being here. We're going to call up the next
7 panel. The next and the last panel. Okay, so a
8 quick hearing today. Avi is here? The other Avi,
9 not the one from the Mayor's Office, but I know when
10 I said Avi everyone peaked up. Not Avi Fink, Avi
11 Leshes from Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Amanda
12 Spray from NYU Langone, Family Clinic and Cohen
13 Veterans Center; and Peter Kempner from Legal
14 Services NYC. [pause] We'll ask the Committee
15 Counsel to swear in the panel, and we will begin with
16 Avi.

17 LEGAL COUNSEL: Can you raise your right
18 hand, please? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
19 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your
20 testimony before this committee, and to respond
21 honestly to council member questions?

22 AVI LESHES: Thank you Councilman Ulrich,
23 New York city veterans and members of the committee.
24 In short, the Brooklyn Chamber would just like to say
25 that we support the creation and expansion of veteran

2 liaisons in every city agency. The Chamber feels
3 that it's important that these veteran liaisons be
4 able to not only advise agencies they work with on
5 the needs of the veteran communities. But to advise
6 on issues facing veteran business owners while also
7 providing assistance to those who need it. In
8 addition to that, one of the key areas we see that
9 this is important when it comes to entrepreneurship
10 because a lot of veterans who are looking to New York
11 City as a way to become and start a business here.
12 But when they get here, they don't realize the
13 bureaucracy and the red tapes comes in tail with it.
14 That's why we feel veteran liaisons are really
15 important, given that they understand the nature of
16 the--of the bureaucracy in New York City, to help
17 them through that process. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I have a question
19 for you that just came to my head.

20 AVI LESHES: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Do you deal with
22 SBS. I know you work with them on a number of
23 issues.

24 AVI LESHES: Yes.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But specifically
3 regarding veterans entrepreneurs, have you worked
4 with them in the past? Have you dealt with a
5 specific liaison? What was that experience like?

6 AVI LESHES: Now what we--what we've
7 done is we deal with them on the workforce one side
8 to help with them because they have a Priority One
9 system. But the Priority One system only works with
10 a veteran who self-identifies.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

12 AVI LESHES: So it's helping them
13 understand how do we change the narrative for
14 veterans who self-identify.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We had the
16 Commissioner testify at a hearing several months ago,
17 and I think she's working on developing a way to
18 allow veterans to self-identify. Have you ever
19 served in the military on the application. I know
20 they're working very diligently on that. That was
21 one of the recommendations actually that came out of
22 the report--

23 AVI LESHES: [interposing] Right.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --is the fact that
25 we simply don't know how many veterans are doing

2 business with the city currently or, you know,
3 wanting to do business with the city. Because we're
4 not asking them that question. You know, if you
5 don't ask them, how are you able to know that. So
6 that's something that they're working on. But I'm
7 just curious because I know you've worked very
8 closely with--

9 AVI LESHES: [interposing] Right.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --SBS. And another
11 question I have for you--and thank you again for your
12 testimony--regarding veterans who want to become
13 street vendors. I'm not--I don't want to get into
14 the whole--you know, we could like three hearings on
15 this topic. But I actually had someone in my
16 district who was a veteran street vendor who has a
17 permit. And I know that there is a certain number of
18 them that were set aside, but maybe it's something in
19 the future, and maybe you can help us collect the
20 data and the information on this. Looking at
21 expanding the number of permits. I think there's a
22 citywide cap of 3,000, but it varies based on the
23 borough, and there are some for people with
24 disabilities and some for veterans. But there are a
25 lot of veterans who are going to be returning to the

2 city, many of whom want to go into business for
3 themselves. Some of whom might not want to start a
4 brick and mortar business.

5 AVI LESHES: Right.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Maybe they want to
7 sell food on the street--

8 AVI LESHES: [interposing] Right.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --and, you know,
10 they have access to capital, but the city is not
11 allowing them to do that because all of the permits
12 are taken. And there's a waiting list that's three
13 or four years long, and that's more on the broader
14 issue. Not getting to the lawsuit and the--

15 AVI LESHES: [interposing] Right.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --gripes that people
17 with the system. But look at, you know, do we lift
18 cap? Do we raise the cap? Do we provide more
19 incentives? That's a conversation that the Chamber,
20 the Council and the Administration should have. I
21 think it has to be done legislatively. But it's
22 something that we ought to look at because I think
23 there is a demand there. And there are a lot of
24 veterans who want to start their own business who
25 come to you for help, that call MOVA. They can get a

2 license, a health license very easily, but when it
3 comes to getting the decal, they've got to wait there
4 years.

5 AVI LESHES: Right.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And, you know,
7 maybe--maybe it's time to look at that number again.
8 So just something that came to my head during--

9 AVI LESHES: [interposing] Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --your testimony.

11 AVI LESHES: You would be more than
12 welcome to look at that.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, and we
14 want your expertise there. Okay, doctor, you're
15 next.

16 DR. AMANDA SPRAY: Thank you Chairman
17 Ulrich and members of the committee or just Chairman
18 Ulrich at this point. Thank you for inviting
19 testimony for our organizations. I'm Dr. Amanda
20 Spray. I am a psychologist and I actually act as a
21 liaison for our organization to the VA Medical Center
22 here in Manhattan. I'm here to provide testimony on
23 behalf of the leadership of the NYU Military Clinic
24 in support of veteran liaisons at city agencies.
25 I'll keep it brief. We believe that it's essential

2 for the City veteran liaisons to partner with non-
3 governmental organizations, such as ours, to best
4 serve the many needs of veterans. Our organization
5 would be very interested in presenting to the
6 veterans liaisons regularly on the services that we
7 provide. This would allow the liaisons to be aware
8 of the variety of private services that may also be
9 available to assist the veterans that they're
10 working--working with. For example, our organization
11 can provide free mental health treatment to not only
12 veterans, but their entire families. A crucial
13 component in supporting the military families'
14 transition to civil life. These services are
15 provided regardless of discharge status, and do not
16 require the veteran be legally married for their
17 significant others to also receive services. Our
18 services can work in tandem with additional public
19 services to help with veterans' unique and diverse
20 needs. Thank you so much for inviting our testimony.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Thank
22 you, Dr. Spray, and we'll conclude with saving the
23 best for last.

24 PEER KEMPNER: Thank you Council Member.

25 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

2 PETER KEMPNER: My name is Peter Kempner.
3 I'm the Director of Veterans Trust Project at
4 Brooklyn Legal Services, a program of Legal Services
5 NYC. I unfortunately suffered from the same
6 misinformation as Ms. Culhane who had testified
7 earlier regarding the role of the veteran liaisons at
8 city agencies. I will say that there is somewhat of
9 a lack of communication and transparency about this.
10 And I appreciate the commissioner's testimony earlier
11 in helping us to understand what their role is, and
12 how we as advocates for veterans in the community
13 could tap into them. Just recently, we actually
14 contacted the Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs in
15 an effort to get the full list of liaisons and their
16 contact information. We were actually told that we
17 would not be provide that information. That the
18 veteran liaisons because they have other jobs in
19 their agencies, we don't want to have them bombarded
20 with questions from the public. And so, they
21 wouldn't release that information to my office.

22 They did say to us well if you want
23 something for a particular agency, we can provide you
24 the contact information for one at a time basically.
25 We were not told that if you are representing

2 somebody who has a problem with a particular city
3 agency that we could use MOVA as a go-between to help
4 contact the liaison. Instead, we were given the
5 information for the NYCHA liaison, and we attempted
6 to contact that person directly. My office, we
7 actually made a great effort to send a very detailed
8 email about a case that we are handling for a very
9 disabled veteran who's facing eviction from a NYCHA
10 apartment. And I could tell you his story, but the--
11 the bottom line is that, you know, from the--The
12 NYCHA liaison never contacted us back. I send her a
13 follow-up email asking her if she had a chance to
14 look at this issue. Again, no response. I then
15 picked up the phone and left her a voicemail asking
16 her, you know, have you had a chance to help with the
17 veteran? Again, no response. And clearly, if the
18 liaisons rose to be the go-between with MOVA it would
19 have been nice of her just to say, Look, you know, my
20 job is to, you know, MOVA in advocating for
21 particular veterans who are seeing assistance through
22 MOVA.

23 But instead, I was just ignored. And I
24 could just imagine, and I think this was mentioned
25 earlier, a veteran themselves who, you know, somehow

2 gets the information for a particular liaison at a
3 city agency. Contacts that person directly, and is
4 ignored. You know, I've got a thick skin. I'm used
5 to being ignored by city agencies. It happens all
6 the time, but, you know, for somebody--for a veteran
7 in crisis, you know, they might not have as, you
8 know, they might let it, you know, roll off their
9 shoulders as easily as I would. And so, I think
10 there does need to be clarity. And to offer a
11 suggestion to say that, you know, maybe we--you know,
12 the City Council and MOVA should consider making
13 these veteran liaisons something more meaningful to
14 the veterans community generally. And have them fill
15 that role of being a direct person that veterans in
16 need, in crisis can contact at a particular city
17 agency. Instead of having to go through MOVA to get
18 that help.

19 You know, it's not always easy for
20 veterans to find their way. That even many of them
21 don't know that MOVA exists. But they're having a
22 problem with HRA or NYCHA, and if there's somebody
23 that they contact directly at those agencies whose
24 role is to deal with veterans that--that may be very
25 useful. [bell] And I will--I will not read you the

2 story of the veteran that I'm helping in this NYCHA
3 eviction proceeding. But, you know, we have
4 contacted many branches of NYCHA in trying to get
5 them to understand this issue that it's very veteran
6 specific. They are budgeting VA benefits called the
7 Aid and Attendance Benefits, which are specifically
8 to reimburse a disabled veteran for home care
9 services. And they're treating it as income for him,
10 and making his rent unaffordable, and now he's facing
11 eviction because of it. And, I was hoping the NYCHA
12 liaison, who is in charge of veterans would have a
13 special understanding. Whereas the attorneys in
14 Housing Court do not. Whereas the grievance hearing
15 officer does not. And unfortunately, we haven't
16 heard from them. [sic] Thank you for the opportunity
17 to testify.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I don't know
19 enough about the particular case, and we can talk
20 offline about this.

21 PEER KEMPNER: [interposing] Absolutely.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But I think there is
23 something to be said, though, that MOVA has to be a
24 portal for dealing with various constituent cases
25 because some of them might involve more than one

2 agency. I don't know the particular details of the
3 case you're bringing up. But I would image that
4 there has to be conversation with court counsel.
5 There has to be a conversation with NYCHA. There has
6 to be a conversation--and that is--that is not
7 something I think a veteran is able to--or any person
8 a civilian would be able to do on his or her own.
9 And so, that's why, you know, MOVA does have a one-
10 stop shop to kind of cut through all that red tape
11 and try to get you an answer. Because it can be very
12 frustrating especially for a veteran who has
13 disabilities who's facing eviction. I mean we--the
14 last thing we want to do is add to the amount of
15 stress. The psychologist can attest to that. It's
16 probably not a good thing, but, you know, to have
17 people from the public in some cases--not in all
18 cases--but hound people that work for particular
19 agencies because they want a stop sign on their
20 corner or because they want something and they just
21 happen to be a veteran. I think it would very, very
22 unfair to the person who a regular day job to do.
23 That's not your situation, but I know, and you know,
24 and I think everybody knows that that may very well
25 turn out to be the case. If we were to publish the

2 names, the phone numbers and emails of these people
3 who have regular duties to do in addition to being a-
4 -a veteran liaisons, you might have people that just
5 drive them insane, you know. I mean, so that's not--
6 we don't want to create that because that would take
7 away or distract from their ability to help other
8 veterans and other people within the agency. But--
9 but you do reinforce another point that came out of
10 this hearing is that I think there is a
11 misunderstanding, a general misunderstanding on what
12 these veteran liaisons do, who they are, what their
13 functions are. I think the Commissioner did a very
14 good job of outlining, you know, and trying to get a
15 handle on the whole situation. But then how do
16 people in the community and the advocates understand
17 that and navigate that? And understand that MOVA is
18 there to help them reach those individuals. But
19 sometimes they have to call other people. Sometimes
20 the Commissioner might have to get on the phone with
21 the Commissioner from another agency. And that's not
22 something that you're able to do. That's not
23 something that I'm always able to do, but she can
24 certainly can do it, and we want her to. Because
25 then she gets an answer, not in a week but in a day.

2 PEER KEMPNER: And Council Member if I
3 may--

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

5 PEER KEMPNER: --you know, when we
6 contacted, when we got the contact information for
7 the liaison if they would have said, Look, this is
8 how it is set up--

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing]
10 Right.

11 PEER KEMPNER: --and so give us the
12 information about the case, and we will contact them
13 directly, we would have happily done that. But
14 that's not how it--

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] But
16 that was a--

17 PEER KEMPNER: --how it was responded to.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --I'm sure that was
19 a miscommunication and you can deal with that
20 offline. But MOVA really is there to act as a go-
21 between for agencies, for individuals, for liaisons
22 to sort through all the layers of bureaucracy because
23 this a city government with hundreds of thousands of
24 employees. And it's there to help. If it's not
25 being helpful, then we want to know about it. But in

2 this case it sounds like you tried to get in touch
3 with the liaison from NYCHA. And maybe that person
4 didn't even know the answer that you were looking for
5 and just, you know, didn't get back to you or
6 whatever. I don't know what the reason is, but
7 technically that individual is not required to answer
8 your questions. They don't have to call you back.
9 They probably should, but they didn't. And it would
10 have been nice for them to call you back and say,
11 Hey, why don't you give MOVA a call and speak to so
12 and so and, you know, we'll be happy to--we'll do the
13 research in the meantime. We'll be happy to get you
14 an answer. But you didn't get that, and so I
15 understand and that's--that's--that is apparent. So,
16 we'll I'm sure--I'm more than certain that you're
17 going to get an answer sooner rather than later at
18 this point as a result of bringing that before the
19 committee. But I want to thank you and Dr. Spray and
20 Avi for coming, and all the advocates for coming to
21 today's hearing. A lot of good ideas. A lot of good
22 dialogue. Sharing information. Next month's
23 hearing--

24 LEGAL COUNSEL: Next Wednesday.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Next Wednesday.

3 Look at that. I'll be--I'll be back and it is on the
4 topic of?

5 LEGAL COUNSEL: Oversight of MOVA.

6 PEER KEMPNER: Oversight of MOVA, which
7 we're happy--we're happy to have again, and we look
8 forward to that. By the way, I want to put in a
9 plug. I mentioned that Loree Sutton comes to every
10 hearing. She really does, and this is the second
11 MOVA hearing--oversight hearing that we're having.
12 To my understanding, before the new Council took
13 session, we didn't have an oversight hearing of MOVA
14 for three years. So she's got two down in one year.
15 I think she's, you know, she's--she's doing a--she's
16 doing a good job, and she's doing the best that she
17 can. And we support her in her mission to help
18 veterans because you all want to help the veterans.
19 So I want to thank you all for coming and that
20 concludes today's hearing.

21 [gavel]

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1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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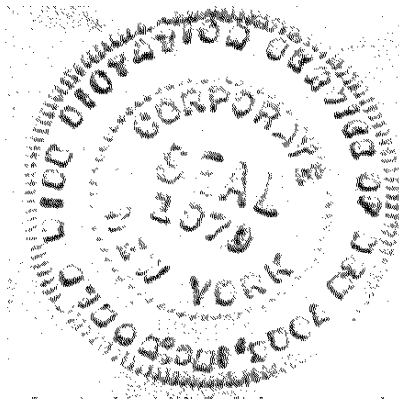
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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 7, 2015