

City Council Veterans Committee Hearing
Monday, December 14, 2009
Commissioner Robert V. Hess
NYC Department of Homeless Services

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Sanders and members of the Veterans Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm Robert Hess, Commissioner for the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and I'm here today to update the Committee on the significant strides made by New York City in its goal to improve services to homeless veterans. I will highlight the additional housing options we have developed for homeless veterans since I last testified before you.

In December of 2006, the City of New York and the federal Department of Veterans Affairs created a Task Force charged with developing a strategic plan to end veteran homelessness in New York City and to end the need for any veteran to sleep on the streets or in the shelter system. Less than three years later, the initiatives created by this unique partnership have led to impressive results.

Having served in the Army and being a veteran myself, I can say I have a personal stake in this mission. I take pride in the work we do for our veterans, and am rewarded when we can keep someone who has served and fought for this country from spending a night on the streets or in our shelter system.

I'd like to acknowledge my colleague – and fellow veteran- Commissioner Roger Newman. Commissioner Newman was appointed by Mayor Bloomberg to serve as the City's first Commissioner for the Office of Veteran's Affairs, focusing on issues impacting the men and women who have served this country. Since his appointment two years ago, Commissioner Newman and I have fostered a remarkable relationship between our two offices. Today I am happy to join him as I discuss some of our collaborative successes in moving homeless veterans into permanent housing.

Reduction of Homeless Veterans in Shelter System

Today, we see remarkable success in the number of veterans living in the DHS system. I am pleased to report to you today that DHS has seen a 62 percent reduction in the number of veterans living in shelter thanks to our permanent and short-term housing programs. In early 2007, DHS housed about 750 single adult veterans on any given night in our shelter system. Today, only 292 veterans remain in the shelter system, with the majority of our veterans, 371, being supported in our short-term housing facilities located in Brooklyn and Queens.

Federal Partnerships

The City of New York and the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are demonstrating a remarkable collaboration to benefit homeless veterans. By partnering our resources, we are serving veterans in an efficient and effective manner that is quickly becoming a national model. The Task Force has kept us laser-focused on our veterans' goals, and led to great success.

NYC and the VA's comprehensive approach maximizes resources through partnership, focusing on permanent housing and providing much needed specialty services to New York veterans through programs such as Project TORCH, short-term housing facilities, and HUD-VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) vouchers.

Project Torch Multi-Service Center, our central point of intake, located in Brooklyn, for veterans, serves as one-stop-shopping and is jointly operated by the VA and the City of New York. At Project Torch, veterans can of course receive needed housing services- both temporary and permanent, but they can also receive much more. Medical services, cash pension services and even short-term financial assistance "one shots" through HRA are all available at Project Torch. The Center, jointly staffed by the VA and DHS, is a national model of its kind.

Many of our veterans continue on from Project Torch to what I consider to be a major accomplishment- short-term housing for veterans. Short-term housing provides transitional housing with dignity and respect as veterans work to move back to homes of their own. Our Borden Avenue facility houses 243 short term units for both men and women and our Porter Avenue facility provides 138 short-term units. Combined, these facilities bring together a unique continuum of care, with the Porter Avenue facility focusing on employable veterans in recovery from addictions, and the Borden Avenue facility assisting all other veterans with a variety of needs. These beds annually, receive over \$4 million in support from the VA.

And we have not stopped there. In October, we opened a veteran-specific 40-bed Safe Haven in the Bronx which provides clients with an immediate safe housing alternative to the streets. This Safe Haven facility provides on-site social services, access to benefits counselors and other VA resources. In addition to having staff and resources to meet their specific needs, vets will also benefit from being surrounded by their peers at the safe haven. Over half a million dollars annually is provided by the VA to support this endeavor.

Homes of their own

Our ultimate goal, though, of course, remains to move our veterans into homes of their own. Through federal partnerships with HUD and the VA, NYC received more than 1,000 Section 8 VASH vouchers—the equivalent of \$8 million in assistance annually- which match housing with support services and VA case management for the most vulnerable veterans, helping them to live successfully on

their own. Since the Task Force was created, more than 2,300 veterans have moved from shelter and the streets to permanent housing, no small accomplishment.

One example of that success is Ronald Marte, who I've had the personal pleasure of meeting. Ronald is a 38-year-old honorably discharged veteran and has lived in permanent housing with a HUD-VASH housing voucher since March 2009. A veteran of the U.S. Army, he was injured while on a tour in Iraq. After being discharged, Ronald lived off of his savings, and eventually sought housing with DHS, and was placed at the Borden Avenue Veterans Residence for short-term housing. When Ronald entered short-term housing for veterans, he was very focused on obtaining permanent housing and employment. With the assistance of a HUD-VASH voucher, Ronald moved into a one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx, and says that his home has changed his life. Ronald now is looking to complete his bachelor's degree in Hotel Administration, and has received a certificate for completing a course in computer programs. Ronald's success story is an inspiration to us all.

Conclusion

Through strong relationships with valuable partners like the VA and the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, DHS is constantly looking to the future and evaluating ways we can better serve the veteran population to ensure that those who defend us receive nothing but the best when they return home. I give my heartfelt thanks for your attention to this important matter.

HPD Veteran's Preference Testimony
December 14, 2009

Good afternoon Chairman Sanders and members of the Veterans Committee. My name is Julie Walpert and I am the Assistant Commissioner for HPD's Division of Housing Supervision. I am responsible for the oversight of the City Mitchell-Lama program. HPD supports providing a preference to recently discharged veterans on the Mitchell-Lama waiting lists. It recognizes the obstacles that veterans face in returning to civilian life and wants to show such veterans our country's respect and gratitude for their service. We are in the process of drafting legislation for passage in Albany that would extend the veteran preference to include current veterans and their surviving spouses who have been discharged within the last five years.

Thank you.



New York and the New Veteran

Right now, the City of New York can offer Post 9/11 G.I. Bill veterans a great overall package for education. If a veteran comes to New York City this is what they can expect to get.

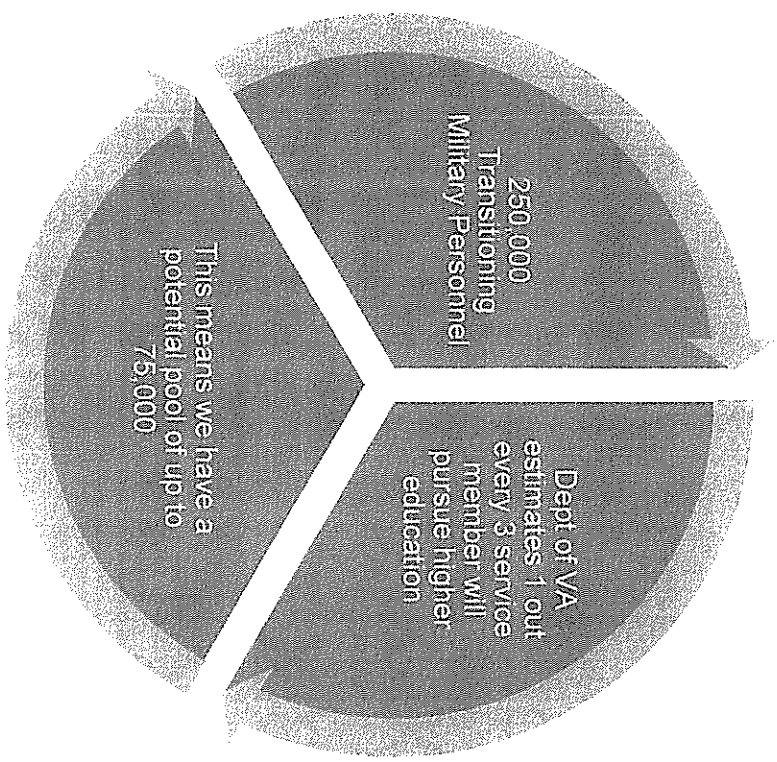
Tuition Covered	\$29,600.00
Book Stipend	\$1,000.00 X 9
<u>Monthly Allowance</u>	<u>\$2,744.00 X 9</u>
	\$55,296.00

This is for two semesters. The majority of this funding will be spent in New York.

■ Veterans will have many options but the ideal is too have a veteran not pay more than 50% of their allotted housing allowance

- Single veteran 1 BR \$900-\$1300.
- Family veteran 1 BR \$1100-1500
- Two veterans (Room mate situation) \$1500-\$1800
- Three veterans (Room mate situation) \$2000-\$2500
- Find campus housing!

Now 1000 only represents .4% of the transition personnel that leave the military each and every year.



That is what is possible for one school year

A college education can take up to four

1000 veterans who can successfully go to school for four years will bring the State and

City of New York

\$29,600 X 1000 X 4 = \$118,400,000

\$2,744 X 1000 X 4 = \$10,976,000

\$1000 X 1000 X 4 = \$4,000,000

\$133,376,000

This is over a four year period



So what does 1000 veterans coming into the NYC mean for the City of NY!

1000 veterans represent

- $\$29,600 \times 1000 = \$29,600,000$ in tuition and fees for NYC colleges
- $\$2,744 \times 1000 = \$2,744,000$ spent on local NYC business for basic needs
- $\$1000 \times 1000 = \$1,000,000$ that will be spent on books and supplies in NY

Mission Statement

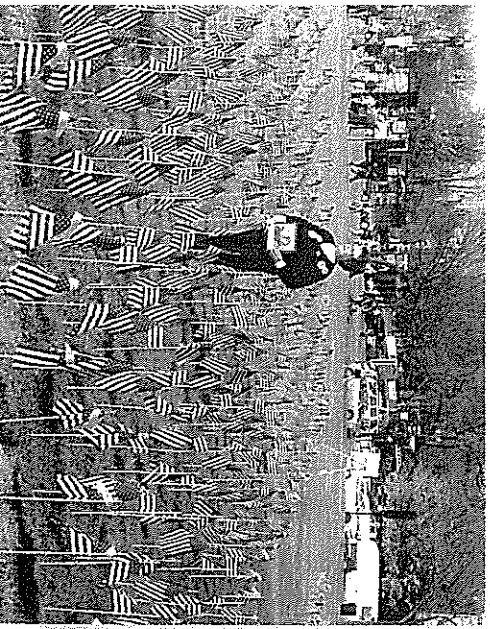
- Recruit qualified ex-military service members to come to the City of New York to pursue their educational goals.
- Provide services to these veterans to ensure they are successful. These services include benefits counseling, housing assistance, tutoring services, degree planning, and referrals to other services.



"I just saw a news story about MFSO this morning. I did not realize that there was a place for families, who have a loved one in the military, to go if they are opposed to the war in Iraq.

Thank you so much for having the courage to form this organization. My son is a 19 year old Army Infantryman and has been in Baghdad since July 2006. I understand that there are reasons, very legitimate reasons, for going to war. I also strongly believe that there were no good reasons for going to this war. I hope that movements such as this will provoke a change."

Anne Chay, mother of a soldier who is serving his first tour of duty in Iraq; Andover, MA



HOW TO JOIN MILITARY FAMILIES SPEAK OUT

If you have a family member or loved one in the military (or who served during the period of this Iraq war), and you are opposed to the war in Iraq, we invite you to join MFSO. Send an email to join@mfsso.org or a note to the MFSO mailing address below. You can order MFSO t-shirts, pins and bumper stickers from the website www.mfsso.org to help spread the message to *bring our troops home now!*

SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES SPEAK OUT

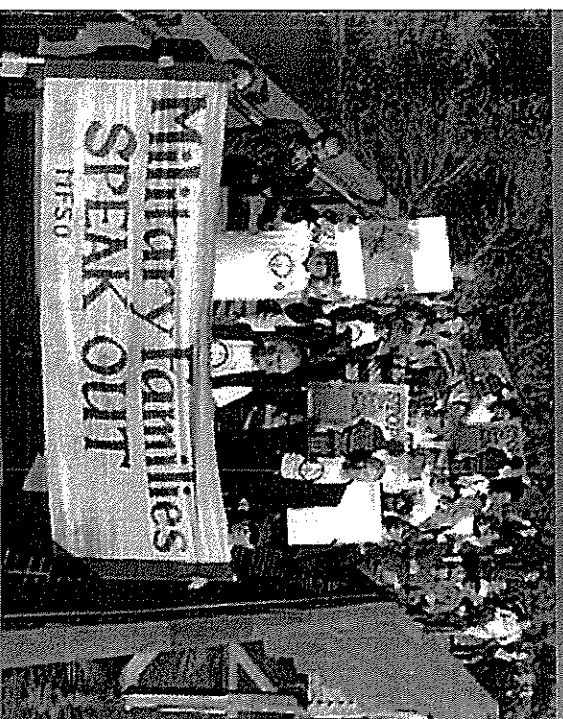
You can support the work of MFSO without being a member. You can make a donation on our website www.mfsso.org or send it by mail to the address below. If you would like to join a supporters list to receive periodic updates and information about MFSO activities, enter your email address onto the "Get Email Alerts" on the MFSO web site.

MILITARY FAMILIES SPEAK OUT

P.O. Box 300549 • Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
617.983.0710
mfsso@mfsso.org • www.mfsso.org



MILITARY FAMILIES SPEAK OUT



Support Our Troops
Bring Them Home Now
and Take Care of Them
When They Get Here!



www.mfsso.org

Military Families Speak Out is an organization of people opposed to the war in Iraq and have relatives or loved ones in the military. MFSO was formed in 2002 by two military families; our membership now includes over 3,200 military families speaking out to end the war in Iraq, bring our troops home now, take care of them when they get here, and end the policies that allowed this unjust and unjustifiable war to happen. New families are joining daily.

MFSO member families include those whose loved ones are currently deployed in Iraq, sometimes for the second, third or fourth time. Other families' loved ones have returned and are still suffering from physical and or psychological wounds from the war. Still others are awaiting their loved ones' first deployment. Over one hundred MFSO member families have suffered the ultimate tragedy – their loved ones have died as a result of the war in Iraq. MFSO has members in every state in the U.S., in Puerto Rico and in several countries abroad.

MFSO gives me a voice for my opposition to the war in Iraq, while still remaining proud of my families' tradition of military service. It is the one place where I do not have to choose any side except for the truth.

Kara Hollingsworth, wife of a soldier who served two tours of duty in Iraq, Ft. Bragg, North Carolina



The year I had two sons serving in Iraq was a living hell. I don't know how I would have survived that year without MFSO. Only another military family truly knows the mind-numbing anxiety of having a loved one on the ground in Iraq - it is a war that you know is wrong.

Larry Syversen
father of four sons who served in the military, the currently active duty, Richmond, VA

MFSO CHAPTERS

MFSO now has over 34 chapters. MFSO local/regional chapters provide contacts for speakers at local events, military family voices for local media, and a presence at vigils and demonstrations against the war. Local MFSO chapters allow members around the country to overcome isolation, connect with other military families opposed to this war, and receive support from other families who understand what we are going through.

Chapters also are a way for military families to link to local activism, make our voices heard, and help build opposition to the war locally. Visit the MFSO website at www.mfso.org to see a list of chapters and find their contact information.

Gold Star Families Speak Out is the national chapter of MFSO for families who have lost their loved ones as a result of this war; their website is www.gsfsso.org.

ACTIVITIES

The families of MFSO are building our voice and working to end the war by:

- ❖ Speaking out publicly at rallies, neighborhood events, faith communities, union halls, schools, universities and community centers
- ❖ Raising our voices in the media to help bring the 'ground truth' and human face of this war to the public
- ❖ Bringing our voices to elected officials at all levels to get them to take a stand against the war, bring the troops home now, and take care of them when they get here
- ❖ Working in coalition with Iraq Veterans Against the War (www.ivaw.net), Veterans for Peace (www.veteransforpeace.org), Vietnam Veterans against the War (www.vvaw.org), Appeal for Redress (www.appealforredress.org) and others to build the movement to end this war.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tom Syracuse

Address: 244 W. 74 St NYC

I represent: Veterans For Peace

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/14/09

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lionelle Hamanaka 646 262-8578

Address: 66 W 94 St 14B

I represent: Military Families & Veterans for Peace

Address: c/o Community Church 28 E 35 St
NYC 10016

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/14/09

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Selena Coppa

Address: 630 9th Ave NY NY 10036

I represent: Iraq Veterans Against the War

Address: 630 9th Ave NY NY 10036

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/14/09

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julie Walpert, Assistant Commissioner

Address: 100 Gold Street

I represent: HPD

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Roger Newman, Commissioner

Address: MOVA

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/14/09

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert V. Hess

Address: 33 BEAVER ST NY NY

I represent: DHS, Commissioner

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DAN ROSSI

Address: _____

I represent: VETERAN UNIONS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: December 14, 2009

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ED Daniels, CHMN

Address: P.O. Box 776 NYC 10030

I represent: INCARCERATED VETERANS' CONSORTIUM, Inc

Address: P.O. Box 776 NYC 10030

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms