



Mayor's Office of
Veterans' Affairs

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**Testimony of Terrance Holliday,
Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs before City
Council re: Int. No. 480 – A Local Law to amend the New York city charter,
in relation to the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs and the establishment
of veteran liaisons.
June 23rd, 2011.**

Good Morning Chairman Eugene and members of the Veterans' Committee. My name is Terrance Holliday and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs (MOVA).

I am here today to testify and offer my support to the Council's Int. No. 480 – A Local Law to amend the New York City charter, in relation to the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs and the establishment of veteran liaisons.

The Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs (MOVA) was established by Local Law 53 in 1987. We advise the Mayor on issues and initiatives impacting the veteran and military community. We work with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs (NYSDVA), City agencies, veterans' organizations, area military commanders and other stakeholders to offer services to veterans, their dependents and survivors; while encouraging innovative partnerships to ensure creative problem solving regardless of military discharge status.

On January 17, 2008, Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed Executive Order 110 which, among other things, requires each agency to assign a senior level staff member to serve as a liaison to MOVA. The agency liaisons work with MOVA to enhance services, provide information and guidance. The agency liaisons have been meeting annually since 2008 to learn about new policies and receive training from local stakeholders that will help to better assist veterans.

The assistance provided by the agency liaisons is invaluable. For example, agency liaisons have helped with the following:

- Assisting veterans who inquire about their applications for the Veterans' Property Tax Exemption through the New York City Department of Finance.
 - Assisting with verification of City employees who may be eligible for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Extended Military Benefits Package (EMBP) for City

employees who are members of the National Guard or reserve .

- Veterans' preference points for NYC civil service examinations. This is also administered through DCAS and depending upon the veteran's military service a Veteran can receive either 5 or 10 preference points on civil service examinations. The liaison assist MOVA with verifying whether a veteran is eligible to use preference points or if veteran has used this benefit.

MOVA has assisted veterans through the Department of Homeless services, Human Resources Administration and New York City Housing Authority to obtain the benefits needed to move into permanent housing. These agency liaisons have assisted in obtaining inspections for apartments, obtaining their HUD-VASH voucher and with moving allowances (one shot deal).

- With the assistance of the city agency liaisons MOVA ran a successful care package campaign that allowed us to send over 6,000 packages to OEF/OIF deployed service members. They are currently assisting us with the Suit Drive campaign to provide interview attire to veterans seeking employment.

As noted above, MOVA has been utilizing agency liaisons for the past three years and we support the proposed legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am available for any of your questions regarding this matter.

Company	Liaison First Name	Liaison Last Name
NYC Department of Corrections	Mr. Alan	Vengersky
Department of Probation	Mr. Anthony	Provenzano
Office of Emergency Management	Ms. Annette	Santiago
New York City Sports Commission	Mr. Amir	Shayegan
Department of Design and Construction	Mr. Jeff	Bonne
NYC Housing Authority	Ms. Dawn	Pinnock
Department of Consumer Affairs	Ms. Dorlene	Cotton
DoITT	MS. Dalela	Harrison
NYC Commission for the United Nations, Consular Corps and Protocol	Ms. Ellen (Leni)	Lifitin
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs	Ms. Matilde	Roman
Administration for Children's Services	Ms. Faustina	Haynes, Ph.D
New York City Department of Buildings	Ms. Lisa	Lewis
Department of Environmental Protection	Mr. Larry	Marchesi
Tax Commission	Mr. Gennaro	Irace
NYC Fire Department	Mr. Tom	Walsh
Human Resources Administration and Department of Social Services	Mr. Greg	Gomez
Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting	Mr. John	Battista
Mayor's Committee on Appointments	Mr. John	Baxter
Housing Preservation & Development	Ms. Lorraine	Blair-Johnson
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation	Mr. Marty	Maier
Department of Health & Mental Hygiene	Mrs. Tammy	Christensen
New York City Department of Transportation	Ms. Marlene	Hochstadt
Department of Juvenile Justice	Mr. Keith	Petersen
New York City Health & Hospitals Corporation	Ms. Nancy	Doyle
Department of Records & Information Services	Ms. Naomi	Pacheco
NYC Commission on Human Rights	Mr. Fritz	Sanchez

Office of Chief Medical Examiner	Ms. Rosemary	Anzalone
Department of Finance	Mr. Peter	Sammarco
New York City Police Department	Mr. Rafael	Pinerio
NYC Dept. of Homeless Services	Ms. Mary	Hall
Department of Youth and Community Development	Mr. Timothy	Johnson
Office to Combat Domestic Violence	Ms. Tracy	Weber
Dept of Citywide Administrative Services	Mr. Robert	Graves
City Planning Commission	Ms. Mychelle	Gayle
NYC Taxi & Limousine Commission	Mr Dominic	Coluccio
Department of Sanitation	Deputy Chief Nicholas	Vero
Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator	Ms. Emily	Pataki
Department of Investigation	Ms. Cynthia	Mathis
Office of Labor Relations	Ms. Jean	Brewer
New York City Department of Education	Ms. Jann	Coles
Department of Cultural Affairs		
NYC Department for the Aging	Ms. Digna	Sanchez
Office of Management and Budget		
Mayor's Community Affairs Unit		
Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities		
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission		
New York City Department of Small Business Services		



**IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN
VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**Testimony of Tom Tarantino
Senior Legislative Associate
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)
New York City Council Committee on Veterans
Hearing on Int. 0480-2011**

Mister Chairman, and members of the committee, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America's 8,000 member veterans and supporters in New York City, thank you for inviting me to testify today.

My name is Tom Tarantino and I am the Senior Legislative Associate with IAVA. I proudly served 10 years in the Army beginning my career as an enlisted Reservist, and leaving service as an active-duty Cavalry Officer in 2007. Throughout these 10 years, my single most important duty was to take care of other soldiers. In the military they teach us to have each other's backs. And although my uniform is now a suit and tie, I am proud to work with New York City to continue to have the backs of America's service members and veterans.

Two of IAVA's main initiatives this year are lowering the staggering 12.1% new veteran employment rate and helping new veterans reintegrate into civilian life after deployment or separation from the military. To help achieve these objectives in New York City, we believe that providing liaisons within city departments to address the unique needs of veterans, particularly those of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, is a promising start. Therefore, IAVA supports the passage of Int. 0480-2011.

Veterans, particularly those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, need advocates in their local communities to help them overcome numerous challenges after release from active-duty. They must deal with a cumbersome and confusing VA system; merge back into their families' daily lives; reintegrate into their jobs; understand what benefits they qualify for under local, state, and federal law and then navigate the application and claims processes. In addition, some veterans must also assert their employment rights under USERRA or their financial rights under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. As it stands, they must navigate most of these challenges alone, without counsel, guidance or encouragement. They lack contacts to expedite the process or the knowledge and experience to determine the best course of action. Additionally, they must expend a significant amount of time and effort, impacting both their work and families. As a result, veterans used to "driving on" to complete the mission without seeking glory or the limelight often get lost in the process. As the saying goes, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease" and culturally veterans tend not to want to be the squeaky wheel, even for benefits they have earned.

IAVA believes that the legislation under consideration can be a significant step for providing the counsel, guidance and encouragement that veterans need as they navigate the readjustment to civilian life. IAVA believes that having a designated veteran liaison within each city department is a necessary step, if only from the standpoint that there is a need for veterans to have an advocate *within* government. Having a designated veteran liaison, a known entity where institutional knowledge and experience resides, will be a significant positive force in speeding along the resolution of any issue that a veteran faces. Having this liaison accessible within the workplace, in each and every department, will provide veterans with ease of access and help assure that this resource is not wasted or unused.

While IAVA endorses this legislation, we must consider other factors. First, the city must ensure that veteran liaisons are more than mere symbols, who have presence but lack authority. Veteran liaisons must have real



power, a clear mission, and access to the highest levels of their department and city government. Their authority must be clearly defined, and advocacy for veterans must be their primary function. It's critical to grant them the power to help veterans in a meaningful, impactful and accountable way.

In preparation for this testimony, IAVA staff communicated with veteran liaisons and veteran commissioners in several cities and states including Chicago, Boston, Connecticut, and Oregon. All expressed the belief that a veteran liaison is an important and necessary function; there is significant demand for their services. This need exists equally in New York City. According to the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, there are over 7,700 military veterans currently employed by the City of New York – a significant population that needs to be served.

Curious about New York's current system for dealing with veterans, our staff contacted the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. Two staff members in the office told us that departmental veteran liaisons exist and that there is a contact list; however, they could not grant us access to it. Instead, they told us to contact the departments directly and, if the departments chose to, they could connect us. Unfortunately, this proved to be a futile exercise: no one we spoke to in the commissioners' offices had any idea who or what we were talking about. Even when we reached an officer at the NYPD who was aware of the veteran liaison, the officer could not give out the name of the liaison or answer any questions regarding the liaison. This is obviously an evolving program and it will take time to get this right. Fortunately, that list is now posted on the Mayor's Office for Veterans Affairs website. Hopefully this will clear up some of the confusion that my staff encountered.

If anything, IAVA believes that this is a clear example and strong argument for formalizing the duties and position of veteran liaisons within city departments. If we, a well-recognized veteran service organization asked to testify before the council on this issue, could not locate or gain access to the existing liaisons, what is the likelihood that a city employee would? Do city employees even know that liaisons exist? We could not locate or speak to the liaisons, so the first of these very basic questions is 'no' and the second remains unanswered.

We did not find any city or state that had as comprehensive an approach as New York City. By placing one liaison in each agency, New York is already ahead of the pack. For example, Boston's liaison deals with the veteran population at large and primarily refers veterans to appropriate agencies and answers basic benefit questions. Chicago was the most analogous. The director of the Chicago's Veterans Affairs Council (VAC) serves as an advocate and ombudsman for veterans employed by the city while the Veterans' Resource Office primarily serves the population at large. Still, the experiences of other cities can provide New York an important roadmap for dealing with issues of veterans' access, labor unions, the need to update city ordinances, provision of services and resource distribution. For example, allocating more than one liaison to departments with a larger population of veterans especially the police and fire departments might be useful.

In conclusion, IAVA believes that New York's plan is a unique solution and worthy of support. IAVA also believes that care must be taken to ensure the efficacy of any proposed solution before implementation, especially when new ground is being broken. With the proper structure and resources, the New York plan could become a model for outreach to veterans within government.

Thank you for your time and attention.



June 23, 2011

Good morning Dr. Eugene. Good morning distinguished members of the New York City Council Committee on Veterans. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of INTRO 0480-2011 A Local Law to amend the New York City charter, in relation to the mayor's office of veterans' affairs and the establishment of veteran liaisons.

My name is Devin Holmes and I am the CEO of Warrior Gateway, a non-profit launched a little over a year ago to help veterans and military families connect with organizations in their local community that are there to support them in all aspects of their life; be it healthcare, employment, education or just connecting with fellow veteran or family member. In May of last year, I found myself here in City Hall announcing a partnership with the City Council to help connect veterans to city services. At that time more than 40 organizations had provided their service information to Warrior Gateway and we had over 17,000 programs and organizations listed nationwide.

Today, within 20 miles of where we stand right now there are over 450 organizations listed in Warrior Gateway that exist to help and support our veterans and their families and we have over 45,000 programs and organizations listed nationwide.

But there is still a long way to go.

After returning home from active duty, our servicemen and women often face a new battle at home. And yet, while the treatments for their injuries in some cases are complex, when they come home to their communities, their desires are simple and straightforward. They want to recover, find their new normal life, and enjoy time with their family and friends. And yet so many of them still ask

Warrior Gateway connects individuals in the military community with organizations and programs (non-profit, government, educational or employment-related) in their neighborhood that are there to support them. By harnessing state-of-the art technology and community collaboration, today's veterans can make better decisions about what service providers they can go to for help, and have a public forum to share their experiences about the quality and effectiveness of those services. For more information, please visit: www.warriorgateway.org.



that simple question: "Where do I go for help?"

Rather than share the alarming and growing statistics on unemployment, homelessness and suicides, I would like to read to you an excerpt from an email I received a couple of months ago from a veteran in Ft. Lauderdale, Fl struggling with post traumatic stress. Her email reads as follows: "My family is in need of help. I am a disabled OIF veteran married to another veteran with multiple deployments. We have 3 children. I need some information before my family breaks apart."

Despite the progress New York City has made, we know from examples around the country like the one I just read that there is a tremendous need to support our veterans and their families who are returning home and that we simply are not doing a good enough job in connecting these individuals with the support that exists in their local community.

In today's world, we use high tech solutions to find the best local restaurants, the hippest bars, the coolest hotels and now through the efforts of the New York City Council in partnership with Warrior Gateway, local programs and organizations to support our veterans and their families.

But sometimes, high tech isn't enough. Sometimes connecting with a live person is what is needed.

Our goal should be to share information and work together so that no matter WHERE our military community looks for information, the answers they receive will be immediate, accurate and consistent regardless of where they ask that question "Where do I go for help?"

As part of this proposed amendment, I would also encourage the City Council

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and Mayor's Office to continue to leverage public-private partnerships with non-governmental organizations like Warrior Gateway that can support individuals like those proposed Veteran Liaisons by providing them with consistent, accurate and easy to use information about federal, state, local government programs and non-profit organizations that support our military community. Information maintained and provided at no cost, which I know the taxpayers will like.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that Warrior Gateway supports INTRO 0480-2011 the Local Law to amend the New York City charter, in relation to the mayor's office of veterans' affairs and the establishment of veteran liaisons. We would like to congratulate New York City, its leaders, its service community and this Committee for taking an active role in serving New York City's veterans, for working to connect them with the support that exists here to help them and for making New York City a role model for the rest of the country to follow.

Thank you.

Signed:

Devin B. Holmes

CEO – Warrior Gateway

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THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

CHRISTINE C. QUINN, SPEAKER

Press Room

**THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS - CITY HALL
NEW YORK, NY 10007
May 24, 2010 - Release # 061-2010**

Speaker Quinn and Council Member Eugene Launch New Online Community for Veterans *'Warrior Gateway' Will Connect Veterans to City Services*

City Hall – City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn and Veterans Committee Chair Mathieu Eugene today announced the launch of a new website to assist veterans with city services. The City will partner with Warrior Gateway, an organization dedicated to assisting veterans, in creating a free online portal that will allow members of the military community to more easily and quickly access the services and programs they need. **Warrior Gateway** Executive Director and **Business Executives for National Security (BENS)** Project Manager Devin B. Holmes and Executive Director of Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) and Former Marine Corps Captain Anu Bhagwhati participated in today's announcement.



New York City is the nation's first city to partner with Warrior Gateway. As part of this partnership, the city will provide a comprehensive list of services available to veterans throughout the five boroughs. The City will also work towards increased participation in the program, by both veteran service providers and veterans.

To date, more than forty New York City organizations have provided their service information to Warrior Gateway. The site, free to use, is modeled after sites such as Yelp and Citysearch and offers links to services from more than 17,000 businesses nationwide. In addition to accessing programs, veterans are able to rate the services they received. Veterans interested in signing up for the free site can visit <http://www.warriorgateway.org>: (www.warriorgateway.org/).

"Now, not only do veterans have this comprehensive list, but they are able to have online discussions about their experiences and hold each organization accountable for what they offer," said Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn. "Warrior Gateway's mission and purpose is vital to the hundreds of thousands of veterans living in New York City. I'm proud to be the first City to partner with Warrior Gateway and we will continue to expand our participation to its fullest extent."

"The Speaker, myself and my fellow members of the veterans committee are working hard to make sure veterans are receiving the services they desperately need. Veterans throughout the city, including those just returning home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, are struggling to connect with service providers. By partnering with Warrior Gateway, we are helping veterans gain access to information about available services, including information about jobs, healthcare benefits and educational opportunities," said Veterans Committee Chair Mathieu Eugene.

"Those who serve in our country's armed forces are on the front lines in protecting the freedoms we value as Americans," said Council Member Al Vann, a veteran Marine sergeant. "We must ensure that we repay their sacrifice by making reintegration into our communities as easy as possible. This website will go a long way towards easing veterans' transition back into civilian life and providing other veterans with easy access to available services. I am proud that New York City is at the forefront in partnering with non-profit organizations to improve services for veterans, and I look forward to building upon this strong foundation."

According to the 2000 Census, approximately 300,000 veterans live in New York City. The data does not take into account the most recent Veterans returning from operations in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The Warrior Gateway applauds New York City, its leaders, and its service community for taking such an active role in serving New York veterans and their loved ones," said Warrior Gateway Executive Director Devin Holmes. "The City serves as a model for other cities and communities nationwide."

About Warrior Gateway

The Warrior Gateway serves as a trusted and reliable resource for the military community to quickly locate service organizations that satisfy their needs, identify academic programs they are interested in and easily find employers seeking their valuable skills. Led by Business Executives for National Security (BENS), a coalition of non-profit and corporate partners collaborate in building and expanding the Warrior Gateway.

About Business Executives for National Security (BENS)

Business Executives for National Security, a nationwide, non-partisan organization, is the primary channel through which senior business executives can help enhance the nation's security. BENS members use their business experience to drive our agenda, deliver our message to decision makers and make certain that the changes we propose are put into practice. BENS has only one special interest: to help make America safe and secure.

**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: _____

Name: Latisha LaMont (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/23

Name: Lionelle Hamarok (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 66 W 94 ST NY 10025

I represent: Military Families Speak Out

Address: mfs0.org

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 480-2011 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/23/11

Name: Tom Tarantino (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 292 Madison Ave 10th Floor

I represent: Iraq + Afghanistan Veterans of America

Address: same

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

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0480-2011 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/23/2011

Name: DEVIN B Holmes (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 1030 15th Street NW Ste 200E
WASHINGTON DC 20005

I represent: Warrior Gateway

Address: same as above

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: _____

Name: Terrance Holliday (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: Commissioner

I represent: Mayor Office of Veterans

Address: Attars

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