

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

----- X

November 15, 2016
Start: 1:13 p.m.
Recess: 4:15 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

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

INEZ D. BARRON
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Fernando Cabrera
Alan N. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone
Joseph C. Borelli
James Vacca
Jumaane D. Williams
Laurie A. Cumbo
Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Vanessa L. Gibson

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

Christopher Rosa, Interim Vice Chancellor
Student Affairs
City University of New York, CUNY

Wilfred Cotto, Coordinator
Veterans Services
Borough of Manhattan Community College, BMCC

Vanessa Cordero, Student
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Leora Shudofsky, Social Worker
Co-Director of Prove, Project for Return Opportunity
and Veterans Education

Joe Bello, Secretary
New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Noah Almanor, Student Veteran
La Guardia College

Ricky Malone

Loren Patterson, Veteran Student
La Guardia College

Yonadi Reyes, Veteran Student
Baruch College

Trent Coyle, Disabled Veteran Student
Baruch College
Executive Vice President
Baruch Student Veterans Association

Melissa Sue, Veteran Student
Baruch College

Jonathan Fermin-Robbins
Hunter College

Sean Sterrett, Veteran Student
La Guardia Community College

Kevin Chemilio, Student Veteran

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

4

2 [sound check, pause] [gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon. I'm
4 Council Member Inez Barron, and I am the Chair of the
5 Committee on Higher Education. Today, we will be
6 holding a joint hearing with the Committee of
7 Veterans Affairs, and that will start after we have
8 the vote on Proposed Intro 119-1138. On June 16th,
9 the Committee on Higher Education held a hearing on
10 Local Law-of Intro 1138, a local law to establish a
11 task force to review proposals for restoring free
12 tuition at the City University of New York.
13 Witnesses testifying were from City University. The
14 University Student Senate, the Office of Management
15 and Budget and Higher Education advocates, and other
16 interested parties. The university had its start
17 from the Free Academy established in 1847 as New York
18 City's first publicly financed institution of higher
19 education. Conceived by the then New York City Board
20 of Education, President Townsend Harris, as a college
21 that would open the doors to all, and that the
22 children of the rich and the poor take their seats
23 together and know of no distinctions say that of
24 industry, good conduct and intellect. The tuition
25 free policy continues through the establishment of

3 the nation's first free teacher's college now Hunter
4 College and the city's first public co-education
5 level Arts College, Brooklyn College. In 1970, the
6 University eliminated all tuition charges and
7 implemented an open admissions policy guaranteeing
8 all New York City public high schools the ability to
9 attend the schools of their choice in the college
10 system. However, CUNY was one of the agents to
11 operate tuition free until the financial crisis of
12 1974. This proposed legislation would establish task
13 force of stakeholders from the CUNY community,
14 government officials, experts in education finance
15 and advocates to develop recommendations on how to
16 restore free tuition to CUNY. The proposed intuit-
17 bill is Intro No. 1138, and at this time I'll ask the
18 Clerk to call for the vote.

19 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk,
20 roll call vote Committee on Higher Education,
21 Introduction 1138-A, Chair Barron.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I vote aye and I
23 encourage all my colleagues to do the same.

24 CLERK: Vacca.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: [pause] Yes, aye.

CLERK: Rodriguez.

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

6

3 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: [off mic] Aye.

4 CLERK: Cabrera.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Aye.

6 CLERK: Williams.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Aye.

8 CLERK: Gibson.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [off mic] Aye.

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

13 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. We will
14 hold the vote open, and at this time we will have a
15 recess as we wait for my colleagues to come. He was
16 delayed in traffic, and at that time, we will
17 continue with the joint hearing. We will hold the
18 vote open, we will recess, and we will have the joint
19 hearing when he arrives. Thank you. [meeting in
20 recess]

21 FEMALE SPEAKER: Hello, everybody. We're
22 resuming. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank You for your
24 patience. We are now ready to resume our hearing.
25 Council Member Ulrich will make his opening remarks
and then I will follow him.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you, Madam
4 Chair. Good afternoon everyone. I am Council Member
5 Eric Ulrich, Chairman of the New York City Veterans
6 Committee. This month, as we do each year, we honor
7 the men and women of our armed forces with Veterans
8 Day celebrations across our city and our country, and
9 it was wonderful to see so many of you at the parade
10 participating last week. But while we take one day
11 to focus on celebrating the service and sacrifices of
12 our veterans, we owe service men—our former service
13 members a duty and a responsibility to honor them all
14 year round, not only on Veterans Day. This means
15 ensuring that they have access to quality healthcare
16 when they need it. This means connecting them to
17 good paying jobs and other employment opportunities,
18 and as we will discuss today. This means making it
19 easier for them to get a quality affordable
20 education. Currently, the City University of New
21 York educates over 3,000 veterans system wide. It's
22 one of the largest student veteran populations in the
23 United States. CUNY student veterans rely on the
24 university to help them transition from active duty
25 to civilian life, and to lay the groundwork for a
prosperous and successful career post-military.

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

8

3 Recognizing the—recognizing the unique needs of these
4 students, CUNY has taken a number of steps including
5 the establishment of a task force on veterans
6 affairs, and the subsequent proposal of several
7 recommendations as well as the university commitment
8 to the principles of excellences for educational
9 institutions and the eight keys to veterans' success
10 implemented by the Veterans Administration of
11 Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of
12 Education. To its credit, CUNY has been recognized
13 as a military friend institution for several years.
14 New York City has the opportunity to leverage the
15 strength of CUNY schools to attract veterans who
16 live, study and work throughout the five boroughs
17 adding an incredible, knowledgeable and skilled
18 workforce to our city. Today, I look forward to a
19 hearing—to hearing from CUNY about the steps they are
20 taking to meet the principles they have committed to
21 upholding to attract more returning veterans to get
22 an education at CUNY schools, and to serve the
23 population of active duty reservists and veteran
24 students everyday throughout the year. Whether is
25 providing them with academic support, making sure
that their education and skills are recognized

1 through the provision of college credit, helping them
2 obtain proper health and counseling services, and
3 making them feel integrated, fully integrated into
4 the life of the university. CUNY's student veterans
5 deserve not only a commitment of excellence, but
6 actual excellence from their school's performance.

7 I'd first like to thank my friend and colleague from
8 Brooklyn Council Member Inez Barron, and the members
9 of Higher Education Committee for joining us to hold
10 this joint oversight hearing. It's a very important
11 hearing, and I'd also like to acknowledge the members
12 of the Veterans Committee on the Council who have
13 joined us today, Council Member Maisel also of
14 Brooklyn was here, Council Member Vallone is here,
15 Council Member Borelli is somewhere, but he'll be
16 here soon, and Council Member Cabrera from the Bronx.

17 Is he her? He was here. I think he's coming back.

18 There--there are several other committees meeting
19 today. Finally, I'd like to thank the Veterans
20 Committee staff Eric Bernstein, Committee Counsel;
21 Michael Kurtz, our Policy Analyst; James Subudhi; and
22 John Russel from the Council Finance Division as well
23 as the Higher Education Committee staff, which I
24 think was already recognized, for all their work in
25

1
2 preparing today's hearing, and I will turn it back
3 over to Councilwoman Barron.

4 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you, Council
5 Member Ulrich. Good afternoon. I want to welcome
6 everyone to today's hearing on Veterans in the CUNY
7 system. As I said earlier, my name is Council Member
8 Inez Barron, and I am the Chair of the Committee on
9 Higher Education. We are joined today by members of
10 the Committee on Veterans, chaired by my colleague
11 Council Member Ulrich. Witnesses invited to testify
12 on today's topic include representatives from the
13 City University, Professional Staff Congress, student
14 veteran organizations, and other interested parties.
15 First, as we're holding this hearing a few days after
16 Veterans Day, I want to express my gratitude to the
17 men and women who've served our country. Thank you
18 for your service. Having said that, I need to say
19 that I'm not a card bearing member of Grannies for
20 Teens (sic), but I do support their opposition to
21 military installations in our education institutions,
22 and I did not advance a curriculum that talks about
23 wars in foreign countries, and I do support Dr.
24 King's position that we've got to address the issues
25 of racism and militarism.

1
2 New York City is home to more than 2,010-
3 210,000 veterans, many of whom have returned from
4 active duty intending to trans-to transition to the
5 civilian workforce. However, despite the fact that
6 military veterans are high trained, often in
7 specialized field that are in great demand in both
8 the private and public sectors, many find that
9 transition difficult without a college degree. As
10 such, CUNY, the largest urban public university in
11 the United States with learning opportunities at
12 every level, and particular courses for PhD at 25
13 campuses across the five boroughs, plays a critical
14 role in addressing veterans' academic needs and
15 facilitating that transition. In doing so, the
16 university has undertaken a number of initiatives to
17 respond to the unique needs of prospective and
18 admitted veteran students. In 2011, following the
19 signif-the significant increase in veteran enrollment
20 at the university due in large part to soldiers
21 returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and
22 Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn in
23 Afghanistan, CUNY convened a task force of Veterans
24 Affairs, to better understand and meet the unique
25 challenges of the veteran student population. That

1 task force released its findings in a 2013 report
2 that recommended CUNY expand its definition of a
3 veteran, update its policy regarding out-of-state
4 tuition rates, engage the private sector in
5 identifying career opportunities for veterans, and
6 improve services to veterans. I'm sure we're all
7 familiar with Harriet Tubman, and we know her as an
8 abolitionist, and we know her as a freedom fighter.
9 But you may not know that she was also a veteran of
10 the Civil War and, in fact, it has been documented
11 that she was the first woman to lead an armed
12 expedition during the war. But such—even though she
13 was a veteran, she faced obstacles similar to
14 veterans today when she was denied any entitlement to
15 veteran-to benefits and a pension as a veteran. So
16 she wages that battle. So, I'm all—also very
17 familiar with the Black Veterans for Social Justice,
18 an organization that I was around at their beginnings
19 when they got founded about 30 odd years ago, and the
20 great work that they have done for our society.
21 Through its Office of Veterans Affairs located at the
22 central office for Student Affairs, CUNY offers
23 prospective veteran students assistance with the
24 application process including an application fee
25

1 waiver, financial aid, housing, legal services,
2 health and wellness and counseling and psychiatric-
3 and psychiatry. Other programs include Projects for
4 Return and Opportunity in Veterans Education or
5 PROVE, which helps veterans transition from the
6 military to academia, and it's offered at seven
7 campuses. In partnership the American Corporate
8 Partners, CUNY also provides career and professional
9 mentorship, and in conjunction with the individual
10 training grant, veterans are offered specialty
11 training through the New York City Department of
12 Small Business Services Workforce 1 Program.

14 Finally, most CUNY campuses feature an official
15 student veteran lounge or club space, and at least
16 seven campuses have an official chapter of student
17 veterans in American. In today's hearing I look
18 forward to hearing more about CUNY services for
19 veterans and how successful CUNY has been in meeting
20 the needs of its veteran student population. In
21 particular, I'm interested in learning about how
22 veterans and military services recognize and
23 translate it into college credits and the mental and
24 health services. We look forward to hearing from
25 students and veterans and learning more about your

3 experiences, and any suggestions they may have to
4 help improve CUNY services, and I want to acknowledge
5 the members of the committee. We were joined by
6 Council Member Vacca, who had to leave. Council
7 Member Jumaane Williams is here. We do have Council
8 Member Vanessa Gibson, and we do have Council Member
9 Laurie Cumbo, and we also [background comments]—I
10 think there as another member. We'll get that name.
11 So we do want to turn it back. Oh, Council Member
12 Cabrera. He was here earlier as well. So with that,
13 having been said, I'm going to turn it back to my
14 colleague Council Member Ulrich. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Chair
16 Barron, and thank you for your commitment to higher
17 education. I know how deeply you care about this
18 issue as a former educator and administrator, and I
19 certainly appreciate your expert—expertise and
20 assistance with today's hearing. [background
21 comments] Yes, we asked the Clerk.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. I want
23 to ask the Clerk if he would again go to the vote so
24 that Council Member Laurie Cumbo can cast her vote.

25 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk.

Roll—continuation of roll call in Committee on Higher

3 Education, Introduction 1138-A. Council Member
4 Cumbo.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I proudly vote on
6 1138-A, and I congratulate Council Member Barron on
7 this important piece of legislation to create a task
8 force on affordability, admissions, graduation rates
9 at the City University of New York. I vote aye.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.

11 CLERK: The final vote on this item now
12 stands a 7 in the affirmative, 0 in the negative, and
13 no abstentions. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you to the
15 Clerk.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, we are going
17 to begin with the first panel, and our first
18 individual to testify representing CUNY Christopher
19 Rose, the Interim Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs;
20 Wilfred Cotto, the Coordinator of Veterans Services
21 at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, BMCC;
22 and Vanessa Cordero, a student from John Jay College
23 of Criminal Justice. I'll ask the Committee Counsel
24 to swear in the panel.

25 LEGAL COUNSEL: [pause] Can you raise
your right hand, please? Do you affirm to tell the

3 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in
4 your testimony before the committee today, and to
5 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

6 PANEL MEMBER: [off mic] I do.

7 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please, sir, at your
8 leisure. [background comments]

9 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Thank you. Thank
10 you. Good afternoon, Chair Ulrich, Chair Barron and
11 distinguished members of the Higher Education and
12 Veterans Affairs Committees. I want to begin my
13 testimony today by thank you sincerely for your
14 ongoing support of the City University of New York,
15 and your enduring commitment to our returning
16 veterans. My name is Chris Rosa, and I'm currently
17 CUNY's Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Thank
18 you also for the opportunity to be-to appear before
19 you on the topic of student veterans at the City
20 University of New York. I'm honored to serve on this
21 afternoon's panel with two of CUNY's most staunch
22 advocates on behalf of the success and wellness of
23 CUNY student veterans. My friend and colleague
24 Wilfred Cotto, Student Life Specialist in Veterans
25 Affairs at BMCC, who proudly served in active duty to
the US Navy for 28 years, and Vanessa Cordero, a US

1 Army veteran student at John Jay College of criminal
2 justice. Welcome. Together we will describe the
3 depth of CUNY's commitment to student veterans as
4 well as share some of the challenges we face in
5 meeting the unique needs of student veterans to
6 ensure their success. CUNY is deeply committed to
7 making our university a first choice destination for
8 veterans. As the nation's leading public urban
9 university, and because of our legacy of providing
10 higher education opportunity for generations of those
11 returning from military service, we believe it is our
12 duty to open the doors wide for today's veterans. In
13 addition, CUNY seeks to attract New York's top
14 students--because we seek to attract our top
15 students, it is in our interest to be an attraction
16 option for veterans. Veterans typically offer a
17 profile that is highly desirable by colleges and
18 universities. Most are mature, goal oriented,
19 mission drive, experienced leaders who work
20 tirelessly to achieve their objective, and look for
21 ways to make meaningful contributions to their
22 community. They not only understand the concept of
23 sacrifice for the greater good, they've lived it. In
24 short, veterans are exactly the kind of students and
25

1
2 role models we welcome on our campuses. CUNY proudly
3 educates more than 3,000 student veterans, an
4 increase of more than 250% of the last eight years.
5 While CUNY student veterans are on average older the
6 general student population, like prior generations,
7 our veterans are typically young adults. Over half
8 are between 20 and 29 years old, and in ways
9 different from previous veteran cohorts, today's
10 student veterans reflect the new realities of
11 military engagements in which they have served. For
12 example, a third of veterans deployed in operations
13 Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn are
14 deployed multiple times. When it comes to college
15 costs, CUNY is by far New York City's most affordable
16 option for veterans. Student veterans who are
17 eligible for the post 9/11 GI Bill at 100% and are
18 residents of New York State can attend CUNY at no
19 cost. Furthermore, veterans who are not New York
20 State residents are charged the same tuition rates as
21 New York State residents for a period of 18 months
22 from their first date of attendance. Finally,
23 veterans are exempt from the CUNY admissions
24 application fee. Indeed, CUNY issues approximately
25 1,100 veterans undergraduate application fee waivers

1 to veterans from all branches of the armed services
2 including reservists and National Guard members,
3 which are placed to almost \$80,000 in value and
4 waivers per calendar year. CUNY understands the
5 transition from military life to higher education,
6 and has put in place a multitude of services to ease
7 this transition. In 2013, CUNY issued the report of
8 the Council of Presidents Ad Hoc Committee on
9 strengthening services for veterans from soldier to
10 scholar. To address the needs of student veterans to
11 examine our practices, and develop recommendations to
12 improve the experience of student veterans at CUNY.
13 This report provided several recommendations that
14 have guided the University to better support
15 veterans. From recruitment to admission through
16 graduation and transition to employment the strategic
17 plan positions CUNY well to comply with President
18 Obama's Executive Order, and to implement the
19 principles of excellences. Our commitment begins
20 with the proactive recruitment of military veterans.
21 Our CUNY welcome centers, veterans-veterans admission
22 teams is a group of talented admissions counselors
23 who are dedicated to serving veteran applicants. The
24 team responds to veteran inquiries, and provides
25

1 basic information about CUNY's programs and
2 resources, the application process and the process of
3 using veterans benefits. Veterans can visit the CUNY
4 Welcome Center to receive assistance in submitting
5 the online application. They can also send their
6 supporting documents to a member of the Veterans
7 Admission Team so the application processing can be
8 expedited. The Veterans Admission team sends campus
9 veterans coordinators lists of the veterans who were
10 accepted to that particular college. The
11 coordinators use the information to proactively reach
12 out to new student veterans and facilitate their
13 enrollment including an informed review of veterans
14 joint service transcripts to grant academic credit
15 for military service. The Veterans Admissions Team
16 work closely with the CUNY ROTC program to assist
17 with ePermits, information sessions, and targeted
18 recruitment. As you know, a CUNY permit is a digital
19 request, which allows a student from one CUNY college
20 to take a course at another CUNY college. Because
21 the ROTC program is only offered at two of our
22 colleges, City College and York College, we help
23 interested students from all other community college-
24 colleges register via ePermit for ROTC at all the
25

1 campuses. Once here, the student veterans have access
2 to services and programming designed to provide a
3 supportive environment and a success academic
4 experience. Some veterans returning from military
5 service can face emotional, financial, academic and
6 cultural obstacles for college transition. To meet
7 unique needs of returning veterans, most of our
8 campuses have full-time veteran services
9 coordinators. These coordinators serve as a one-stop
10 resource for student veterans. Most of our campuses
11 also have established dedicated co-curricular space
12 for student veterans. One of the finest examples of
13 this is the Veterans Club space at alma mater Queens
14 College, which used an \$8,000 grant from the Students
15 Veterans of America and the Home Depot to purchase
16 lounge and pantry furniture, a computer, appliances
17 to create a welcoming space where Queens student
18 veterans can study, relax, connect with each other as
19 well as network with other student organizations. In
20 addition, many CUNY faculty and staff members receive
21 military cultural competence training. Several of
22 our colleges have cross-campus working veterans
23 services teams comprised of key offices that impact
24 the student veteran experience including Academic
25

1
2 Advisement, the Certifying Official, Disability
3 Services, the Bursar, Financial Aid, the Registrar,
4 and the Counseling Center. We are also fortunate to
5 have Projects for Return and Opportunity in Veterans
6 Education, PROVE, currently on 14 campuses. PROVE
7 assists student veterans in their transition from
8 military life to college and civilian life, and my
9 colleague Leora Shudofsky will speak more richly
10 about the great work that proved those. But essen-
11 essentially, teams of student veteran mentors,
12 graduate social work interns, and social work field
13 instructors work with campus professionals to enrich
14 existing services to veterans. Again, you'll hear
15 more about PROVE in an-in a few minutes. They will
16 be testifying shortly. Many soldiers, Marines,
17 airmen, sailors join the military before their 21st
18 birthday, and for many, it's the only job they've
19 ever held. While this training and experience are
20 certainly invaluable, it's not always intuitively
21 translatable to civilian employment. In addition,
22 many returning veterans face structural barriers for
23 employment causing veterans to struggle in their
24 transition to civilian-to the civil workforce. CUNY
25 is committee to helping student veterans successfully

1 transition to the civil workforce. Career readiness,
2 internship, and post-graduate employment for student
3 veterans are CUNY's top priorities. CUNY partners
4 with both public and private sectors to cultivate
5 opportunities for our student veterans. We organize
6 student veteran job fairs. Examples include the very
7 recent CUNY 2016 Academic Awards and Resource Fair,
8 which provided many of CUNY's most outstanding
9 student veteran scholars the opportunity to network
10 with more than 60 leading employers in our city. In
11 addition, we connect our student veterans to valued
12 organizational partners that through mentoring
13 programs and career counseling, help prepare student
14 veterans for the world of work. American corporate
15 partners connect veterans with business leaders
16 through mentorship and online career advice. Edge
17 for Vets assists veterans with transitioning their
18 military service into resiliency tools for success,
19 and Four Block assists veterans in bridging the gap
20 from academics to career development. CUNY faculty
21 is keenly aware of the unique experience of student
22 veterans. Recently, Hunter College received a grant
23 from the National Endowment for the humanities to
24 promote a better understanding of military service
25

3 and promote support for student veterans. This grant
4 will fund—will fund public events and classroom
5 opportunities for veterans and the student veteran to
6 have the opportunity to co-facilitate conversations
7 about the lived experience of military service, and
8 what it can teach us all about moral development,
9 ethics and leadership. In closing, I'm very please
10 to announce that earlier this year, the City
11 University of New York became the first university
12 system in America to be named military friendly in
13 recognition of its programs for veterans. Members of
14 the armed forces leading the military service, and
15 their military spouses. The designation by Victory
16 Media, the founder of the 13-year-old program, was
17 given to all 17 CUNY schools. We are proud of this
18 system wide military friendly designation as an
19 affirmation of our incremental progress for—towards
20 cultivating and sustaining a university that truly
21 embraces and empowers its student veterans. Again,
22 thank you for this opportunity, and it's my honor to
23 introduce my friend and colleague Wilfred Cotto.
24 Thank you. [pause]

25 WILFRED COTTO: Thank you Interim Vice
Chancellor Rosa. Good afternoon, Chair Ulrich, Chair

1
2 Barron, honorable members of the Veterans Affairs and
3 Higher Education Committee. My name is Wilfred
4 Cotto. I am a retired Navy veteran currently serving
5 as the Coordinator of Veteran Services at the Borough
6 of Manhattan Community College, BMCC. Thank you for
7 this opportunity to highlight some of our program
8 efforts in support of our student veteran population.
9 There are currently 458 student veterans enrolled at
10 BMCC, of which 160 are new students this semester.
11 This accounts for 15% of the university's total
12 student veteran population, and the largest student
13 veteran population amongst all CUNY colleges. BMCC
14 has a full service veterans resource center, which is
15 staffed by one full-time student like specialist; two
16 part-time college assistants; two graduate social
17 work interns; and 15 VA work study student veterans.
18 There is also a full-time licensed clinical social
19 worker assigned to the Counseling session-center, who
20 specializes in veteran related issues. The mission
21 of the BMCC Resource Center is to support students-to
22 support military veterans, active duty and reserve
23 personnel and their families during their transition
24 from military life to campus life by supporting the
25 central community-by foster-by fostering a central

3 community among student veterans, faculty and campus
4 staff, and by working closely with community partners
5 to ensure a successful transition beyond the college
6 experience. BMCC complies with guidelines mind-
7 mandated by (1) The Executive Order 13607, which
8 establishes the Rules of Excellence, (2) the VA's
9 Eight Keys to Veterans' success, and (3) the
10 recommendations made by the CUNY Council of
11 Presidents Task Force Report on Veteran Services.
12 Based on these mandates and recommendations, BMCC
13 designated a single point of contact on comp-on
14 campus for all veteran related matters, created a
15 veteran specific state where veterans can gather and
16 services can be coordinated the Veterans Resource
17 Center; established a Veterans Support Team
18 throughout the campus made up of representatives from
19 Admissions, Academic Advisory, Registrar, Bursar,
20 Financial Aid, Counseling, Disability Services,
21 Career Development, and Health Services. We approve
22 all prospective student governments with the
23 application and admissions process. We conduct
24 Veteran specific orientation session. We offer
25 academic advisement unique to the student veterans.
We ensure that student veterans understand the GI

1 Bill Educational Entitlement. We provide student
2 veterans with financial advice to ensure they
3 understand the total costs of an education program.
4 We accommodate service members in the service when
5 absent due to military service obligations, and we
6 provide peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities with
7 approved program and our VA Work Study peer mentors.
8 In-in addition, our organization for student veterans
9 is one of the most active clubs on campus. The
10 organization meets every Wednesday from 2:00 to 4:00
11 p.m. Every week there are professional speakers
12 scheduled to come in to speak and discuss programs
13 and services available for veterans throughout the
14 local community services, our jobs, employment
15 assistance, housing assistance, health and mental
16 health care, legal assistance to assist student
17 veterans with that experience beyond the campus. The
18 organization sponsors a number of off-campus trips,
19 events, and activities throughout the semester, and
20 collaborates with other campus clubs to help foster
21 as sense of community and belonging to all student
22 veterans on campus. This is the third consecutive
23 year BMCC has been designated as a top military
24 friend of the college by Victor-by the Victor-Victory
25

3 Leader Organization. With your continued support, I
4 am sure that BMCC will continue serving the needs of
5 student veterans transitioning from the military to
6 college for many years to come. On behalf of all
7 students veterans at BMCC thank you. With that, I
8 want to introduce my colleague Vanessa

9 VANESSA CORDERO: Good afternoon. My
10 name Vanessa. I am a veteran from the United States
11 Army. I serves as a combat medic. I am currently a
12 CUNY student looking forward to graduating in 2017
13 with my bachelor's in criminal justice. I have had
14 the privilege of attending two CUNY schools, first
15 attending BMCC, where I was given an associate's
16 degree in criminal justice, and graduated with
17 honors. I am currently a student at John Jay
18 College, and maintain a 3.9 GPA. I owe a lot of my
19 success to the Veterans Resource Center. Here, I can
20 feel at home, and I can always find someone to assist
21 me with any matter that I have. I have to comment
22 CUNY for its efforts in—in order to facilitate a
23 transition from soldier to student. Never before
24 have I felt an immense gratitude for the service that
25 I have provided as a soldier. CUNY staff go above

3 and beyond for their student veteran population and I
4 thank you guys for having me. [pause]

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Alright,
6 thank you so much for your testimony. Did you want
7 to add something? Okay, thank you for your testimony
8 and to the two of you in particular thank you for
9 your service to our great country. So I have a few
10 questions that I'll begin, and then I'll see if any
11 of the members of the committee or my co-chair has
12 any questions. For CUNY in particular, I'm curious
13 about the dropout rates for students, for veteran
14 students at CUNY. Do you have any statistics that
15 show if there's a higher or lower rate for certain,
16 you know, either areas of concentration of study or
17 or age or ethnicity or any other breakdown? I know
18 that CUNY studies the dropout rates for all of the
19 students here, but do you have any data on the
20 student veterans?

21 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Yes. Generally
22 speaking the—the retention rate of veterans has been
23 improving over—over the last four to five years, but
24 it's still—the retention rate is still below the
25 general student population, and I think that it
speaks to the—the opposite or so more challenges that

1 veterans encounter, but I think that we've seen the
2 incremental improvement in those rates, and I think
3 it speaks to our—our growing commitment to serving
4 CUNY veterans. And I think that you'll—you will see
5 us begin to approximate the general retention rate of
6 students through our commitments going forward.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And—and perhaps, Mr.
9 Cotto, you could expand on this. What does your
10 office do to assist student veterans who are facing
11 failing or dropping out of the CUNY system? Do you—
12 do you have any type of special interventions or any
13 type of special counseling or outreach that you do to
14 sort of extend that issue?

15 WILFRED COTTO: Yes, we do, Chair Ulrich.
16 Actually, we do all of the above. So it begins with
17 the earlier notification that comes through the
18 Veterans Resource Center right then, and we turn
19 around and—and reach out with the outreach and
20 contact the student, invite him or her in to talk to
21 the immediate staff and myself to kind of gain what's
22 going on. They could be personal issues, it could be
23 work-related issues, it could be academic issues.
24 And then we try to find ways for them to speak to the
25 Council, the advisors or even get tutoring assistance

1 if necessary on campus to help them through the
2 semester, and—and then we—we kind of monitor them
3 from there. Some—some take our advice. Some seek
4 out assistance, some get through the semester and be
5 okay, and others just, you know, for whatever reason
6 just can't seem to get it together. But we try to
7 help them.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So I just have two
10 more quick questions. The first is not the focus of
11 today's hearing, but we did have a hearing two years
12 ago with CUNY and SUNY, and they participated
13 regarding the awarding of college credit, and one of
14 the things that we discovered as a result of that
15 hearing was that it's left up to each individual
16 college in terms of what skills and talents that
17 people gain while they were serving in the military,
18 and how we transfer them over into college credit.
19 Has CUNY considered mandating or setting a template
20 system wide for what type of credits? For instance,
21 if you were an MT in the Army and you get out, can
22 you get an intro to criminal justice, three credits,
23 regardless of whether you go to go to Queens College
24 or John Jay? It really shouldn't matter which CUNY
25 school you're attending. It's certainly skills or

1 things that were learned in the military should
2 translate into college credits. Has there any—been
3 any discussion in the higher up—from the higher ups
4 at CUNY about that?
5

6 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Yes, Chair Ulrich,
7 thank you for asking. I'll allow my colleague
8 Wilfred Cotto to speak to it in a little bit more
9 granular way, but in broad strokes we've identified
10 this as a problem, and—and I think particularly in
11 our Admission Services team they've—they've indicated
12 that, you know, it seems almost patently unfair that
13 students can come to different institutions with the
14 same information, and have the credits valued
15 differently. So we've acknowledged this as—as a
16 problem. Our Admissions team is working on it. We
17 gathered our committee of transfer credits evaluation
18 coordinators to begin to work on a proposal with the
19 university registrar, and I think that we're trending
20 towards a solution where there would be greater
21 parity and more equity in the way that credits are
22 awarded. It's—it's a work in progress. Wilfred.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Certainly, every
24 union—every veteran is unique, and we don't want to
25 take away any flexibility for the awarding of

3 elective credits. For instances there's special
4 skills. There's specialty of training that they may
5 have received because not all veterans are the same,
6 and not all veterans receive the same specialty
7 training for whatever their MOS or what their duties
8 were in the military, but we want to make sure that,
9 as you suggested, the parity, the equity issue is
10 addressed and perhaps the task force that the CUNY
11 Chancellor has convened can really study that and set
12 boilerplate and actually list the course numbers.

13 That if you have this particular skill or you
14 performed this particular function while you were
15 serving in the Navy or the, you know, the Marines or
16 whatever branch of the service you were in, you can
17 potentially receive credit for these courses. You
18 know, and—and list them so that the students know. I
19 think that that's important that they know before
20 they meet with the admissions counselor what—what
21 they might be eligible for, and then they might even
22 be eligible for more credits based upon their
23 interviews and interactions with the Admission staff.
24 Perhaps you want to expand.

25 WILFRED COTTO: Well, I just want to say
that in practice, it's actually done that way. It's

1 not in policy yet, but I'm sure that a number of CUNY
2 campuses do make up the individual and do take into
3 account her military training and experiences into
4 consideration, and do try to line them up with
5 academic credit. The--the difficulty comes at the
6 community college level when they're looking at
7 degree time that only allows you 60 credits to play
8 with, and you have all these other academic
9 requirements. How does this MOS--how does this
10 particular rating fall into the--the academic program?
11 If it doesn't fit let's say for example if you're an
12 MP in the Army, the Military Police, and you're going
13 to study criminal justice, that's a good fit, right?
14 So we can find a need for it. In you're a combat--
15 combat medic in the Army and then you are going to
16 study something along in the health sciences or
17 something, then we can fit that into it. So, it--it's
18 an academic challenge, but and--and--and, you know, I
19 think we try to do the best we can to try to fit it
20 where it makes sense. It's just that sometimes the
21 academic requirements of the--of the degree program
22 don't allow for all of it.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think, though,
25 when you do come with a plan, whatever the plan may

1 be, and it doesn't have to address every specific M-O
2 as in every specific skill, you know, that is in the
3 military and the armed forces. But I do think it's
4 important that you promulgate that plan, and you
5 don't keep it to yourself, but you put it on CUNY's
6 website, put it on the blackboard. Put it on CUNY
7 first. Put it on one of these tools that the
8 students can access, and the public can have access
9 to, to know that these are just some of the ones that
10 have been preapproved by the Board of Trustees at
11 CUNY. I think that would be a good start the fact
12 that, you know, it is still up to each individual
13 institution. It leaves room for rather arbitrary
14 awarding of credits. So I just—I just want to put
15 that out there. The last question then I—I promise
16 I'm done here, and I'll turn it back over to my
17 Chair, is what is CUNY's current budget for veteran
18 specific programs? Is there—is there a budget line
19 for specific programs or clubs for each college, or
20 it is—it is a system wide I think. Could you walk me
21 through that please?
22

23 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Sure, Chair
24 Ulrich, the—there's a line item in the State Budget
25 of \$1 million a quarter of a million dollars, which

3 is allocated to all of the campuses, and in addition
4 to that, each campus makes a—a campus commitment to
5 building its veterans services infrastructure. I—I
6 would have to get you and I will, the exact spend on
7 the campus guide, but in looking just generally at
8 the ledger, it' comparable to the state's
9 contribution. [pause]

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Than you very much,
11 Mr. Chair. I have a few questions, and then I'm
12 going to ask my colleagues who are here if they have
13 questions that they want to present as well. You say
14 that there are 3,000 veterans enrolled. Perhaps you
15 don't have it now, but if you could give us that
16 information disaggregated, a degree or a school by a
17 major, do you find that more veterans tend to select
18 a particular major in the various campuses? So
19 that's not perhaps information you have now, but we
20 would like to have it disaggregated by degrees, by
21 the school, by the major, by class in year, by age,
22 by race ethnicity, by the service era, and by student
23 veterans as opposed to student reserves—reservists.
24 So if you could get that to us, we'd— But do you
25 find that there's a particular major area that
there's a concentration of veterans in?

3 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Well, first, if we
4 comment, and I believe I have that—that information,
5 but the top five baccalaureates are branches in which
6 veterans are enrolled are liberal arts and sciences,
7 criminal justice, accounting, psychology and business
8 administration. And again, I'll get this into you in
9 a more comprehensive report, and for associate degree
10 programs the top five are liberal arts and sciences,
11 criminal justice and correction, business
12 administration, physical sciences and nursing.

13 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Nursing, okay, I've
14 been talking a lot about nursing, and it seems that
15 the nursing standards are really quite high, and I've
16 been told that you've got to maintain that B average
17 in order to remain in the program. My colleague
18 asked about what other kinds of supports are
19 available, and certainly we know that the veterans
20 have a unique set of circumstances that they bring
21 when they've come from those environments. So, are
22 there any provisions then particularly talking about
23 the Nursing Program that would allow for veterans to
24 have the opportunity for special consideration if, in
25 fact, they drop below what may be required to be
maintained in that program?

3 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: As you know, BMCC
4 has an extraordinarily fine and competitive nursing
5 program, and Wilfred mentioned. He can speak to the
6 experiences of veteran nursing students.

7 WILFRED COTTO: And—and what I could say
8 to that is that if we came across a student that was
9 struggling in the program, we would refer the student
10 to the Academic Affairs Department, if you will. We
11 have an advocate in—in—in the Dean of Academic
12 Affairs being one, and could—could really look and
13 drill down and—and see what can be done to assist and
14 support the students to try to retain him or her in
15 the program. I can't speak to—to much more detailed
16 than that, but we do have an advocate and we do have
17 a way to address it with the—the Department of
18 Academic Affairs on our campus.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And I would imagine
20 that as veterans there's a quite a need to be
21 conscious of the PTSD, Post-Traumatic Stress
22 Syndrome, and are you equipped or are the people on
23 staff that address that issue or do you then refer
24 someone who might be having those kinds of challenges
25 to another kind of facility? Because as I'm looking
at all of the situations that are occurring in the

1 news today, and people who have situations that were
2 not addressed, that they did not receive the
3 appropriate services to help them cope with what
4 advices--advices. So do you have that capacity on
5 campus, or do you refer them to other agencies and
6 departments and hospital services of the veterans
7 organizations?
8

9 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Chair Barron,
10 we've seen a very significant spike in the enrollment
11 of--of student veterans with PTSD with traumatic brain
12 injuries, and experiencing depression, and our
13 Veteran Services Off--Officers collaborate very
14 closely with our Office of Disability Services. And
15 most especially our CUNY LEADS program, which the
16 Council has been such a strong champion now. And in
17 addition to providing and working with our Mental
18 Health Counseling Centers on campus to help students
19 to manage the effects of--of PTSD, our CUNY LEADS
20 Program also works with very disability specific
21 career readiness to help students to understand the
22 accommodations for which they might be entitled in
23 the academic sphere, and then in the--in the world of
24 work related to their--to their service connected
25 disability and to be able to--to leverage that to get

3 the career readiness they need to make successful
4 transitions in disability and life. Our-our Mental
5 Health Counseling Centers provide some-some
6 counseling but have referral relations with community
7 based organizations to help individuals to get
8 ongoing treated for PTSD, and other psychiatric
9 disabilities.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you and is
11 there any types of training that faculty receives or
12 any kind or orientation that faculty members are
13 offered that might help them to be aware of any kind
14 of differences in behavior that might signal a need
15 to have a conference with a veteran or talk to the
16 veteran, and see if perhaps they need to be brought
17 to another referral agency? So is there any
18 sensory-sensitizing of staff that's done, faculty?

19 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Many of our
20 campuses, Chair Barron, participate robustly in
21 Cultural Confidence Training for all faculty, for
22 members of the faculty and staff. Our sense of it is
23 that this is clearly an areas for improvement and
24 growth in terms of university wide commitment by
25 faculty and staff. I think-I'm sure you-you know
through your listening closely to faculty that

3 faculty had very cold plates, and that any type of
4 faculty development is—is a challenge. So we're—
5 we're going to be looking at creative ways to engage
6 more faculty in cultural competency training, but
7 there are some campuses that do it very well, and I
8 think we would emulate their best practices and BMCC
9 is a place that does it very well.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So is it, in fact, a
11 part of the Cultural Competency Training that—that's
12 embedded in there—

13 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: It is.

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: --or is it at each
15 school that—that's an area that they've highlighted?

16 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: It's embedded in
17 the cultural competency training, but the iteration
18 of it at different campuses sort of takes different
19 forms, and maybe Wilfred you could speak to how it
20 happens at the BMCC.

21 WILFRED COTTO: So, at—at BMCC, what
22 happened was all new faculty and the new faculty
23 orientation get briefed and get exposed and award of
24 federally related issues by the Vice President of
25 Student Affairs, and she informs them of the size of
our student population, what their issues are, recent

3 development, challenges and things of that nature,
4 and also introduces them to the veteran staff so that
5 if there are any problems or any concerns, they can
6 reach out to us. They can inform us, and have that-
7 that communication and it's going. So, yes, that's
8 how it's done at-at BMCC. Oh, by the way, I do want
9 to take a moment to say that-that some council
10 students, most council students we do have
11 professionals that do specialize in PTSD, and-and so,
12 at-at BMCC we have a licensed clinical social worker
13 who specializes in veteran services, and he is very-
14 very well trained, and very well versed on-on
15 diagnosis of things along with a psychologist, and
16 also the Director of the Counseling Services. So we
17 do have people there that can immediately help when
18 we need them to.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. In your
20 testimony, Dr. Rosa, you indicated that there were
21 four campuses that had approved programs, but I think
22 on your website it says that there are two. So seven
23 sites. Okay.

24 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: My-my colleagues
25 at PROVE, I think will speak to this, in their
26 testimony, but because of a reduction in funding,

3 they reduced the number of sites, group sites from
4 seven to four and it's—it's our hope to support them,
5 not only to restore the level of funding to allow
6 them to operate at the—at the level at which they
7 were operating, but it's a remarkable best practice I
8 think in post-secondary education and serving that it
9 represents the very best that we do of empowering
10 our—our finest CUNY students to serve student
11 veterans.

12 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So what is the
13 course of the funding for PROVE?

14 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: My understanding
15 is that it was grant funding. Well, we—CUNY provides
16 funding through the State, but it was augmented by
17 grant funding by—by through the Robin Hood , and my
18 understanding is that—is that that was reduced.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, and does CUNY
20 maintain a relationship with the Veteran's
21 Administration or with the Veteran's Hospitals, and
22 is there ability to make those kinds of referrals,
23 and perhaps cut through some of the red tape, or--?
24 [background comments]

25 WILFRED COTTO: So the Department of
Veterans Affairs, the local hospitals here on 21st

1 Street in Brooklyn and in the Bronx are all
2 supporters of CUNY. They often come to our CUNY
3 Council, Veterans Affairs leading. They—they know
4 who all the Council's coordinators are. We connect
5 with all the outreach people on campus. They—they do
6 rational health. They do healthcare enrollment on
7 site. They visit campuses, and so the relationship
8 is—sis strong, and ongoing, and we're a big part of
9 what they do because we gain access to a lot of new
10 students, new veterans just returning to New York
11 City. Often times they are not aware of their VA
12 entitlements or the fact that they can even enroll in
13 VA Healthcare, and we immediately turn around and
14 connect them with the right people, and get them
15 started in that effort.

17 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That was the
18 question I was going to ask in terms of outreach so
19 that veterans know that they can attend CUNY free of
20 charge or at no cost. So to use the hospitals and
21 the Veterans Administration to do that and let them
22 know. Okay. And what happens if a veteran has to
23 redeploy during the time that they're enrolled, and
24 there's an interruption in their coursework? What
25 happens? Do they come back? What happens with the

3 grading? Do you find that that's an instance of that
4 happened when they have to take a leave and they're
5 absent from school?

6 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: It's our formal
7 policy to offer maximum flexibility within the
8 existing university rules, Wilfred would you mind
9 just speaking to this for a second?

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And does it have an
11 impact then on their returning and actually
12 graduating? Do you find that that interruption in
13 their schooling and their education has a negative
14 impact?

15 WILFRED COTTO: So when a [coughs] when a
16 veteran is—is called to active duty depending upon
17 the situation, that—that deployment could be anywhere
18 from six months to a year to maybe 18 months long.
19 So—so is it going to interrupt their academic
20 pursuit? Yes it will. If the veteran gets called in
21 the middle of the semester and, you know, it's no
22 fault of theirs and—and there are—there are documents
23 that are military orders that are saying the vet has
24 to go, then we relieve the vet of all
25 responsibilities in terms of payments or costs of
tuition that may be due. We relieve them of that

3 responsibility based on their military obligation.

4 Now, once the veteran returns, then we just pick it
5 from there, and, of course, at that time they've
6 missed two or three semesters of academic work, but
7 we—we admit them into the college, and we allow them
8 to continue where they left off.

9 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And I need to echo
10 the chain of questioning that my colleague asked in
11 terms of the some type of standardization of how
12 military service can be translated into credits so
13 that it's not at the discretion of a particular
14 school how that happened. But there's some kind of
15 standardization just as we have the ability through
16 Pathways to talk about okay this is the same wherever
17 you're going, and it's going to be able to be
18 transferred. So I think that that's something that
19 would be important as well. In terms of the dropout
20 rate for veterans, do you find that it's comparable
21 to the general dropout rate, and do you find a
22 particular reason that the veterans are dropping out?
23 Do we have any way of tracking that data?

24 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: The—the retention
25 rate, which is sort of the inverse of the drop-out
rate, veterans—the—the gap is closing, but they still

1 lag behind similarly situated students, and I'll—I'll
2 be able to get you that data. And I—I think the
3 reasons for which they—they drop out are—are many and
4 varied. Some of them are adjustment issues even
5 though we're—we're making progress towards that.
6 Some of them are—can be financial issues, and we're—
7 we're working through resources like single stocks on
8 our campuses in order to help to mitigate some of the
9 financial pressures that are associated with
10 continuing in school, and some—there are some service
11 related disability issues that certainly complicate
12 academic momentum and progress towards a degree.
13 Wilfred, did you want to add to it?

14
15 WILFRED COTTO: And just one more that—in
16 the wings. It's—it's a positive thing because
17 sometime veterans decide they want to work full time,
18 and they gain gainful employment, and they get—they
19 get offered opportunities that are lucrative, and
20 they decide, you know what, I'm going to go to work
21 instead of continuing in school. So if that's the
22 decision they make for their best—in their best
23 interest to support their family, okay.

24

25

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. Can you
4 talk about the current staffing for CUNY's Office of
5 Veteran Affairs? What does that staffing look like?

6 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: At-at our central
7 office--

8 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] At the
9 Central Office.

10 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: --of Student
11 Affairs, we have a vet-a Director of Veterans
12 Services Lisa-Lisa Beaffa (sp?). We stand to regret
13 she is out of the country. She couldn't be here
14 today, but she's a strong advocate on behalf of
15 student veterans. Lisa has a half time person who
16 reports to her, and several veteran work study
17 students who are-are remarkable, and enrich our
18 perspective, and enrich our work on behalf of student
19 veterans just through their insight of the lived
20 experience of being a veteran.

21 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And on the campuses,
22 the person who is the liaison or the point person for
23 veterans, is that their sole responsibility, or do
24 they have other functions and other responsibilities
25 that they perform as well as at the school?

3 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: For--for the lion's
4 share of them it's their primarily responsibility--

5 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

6 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: --but there are
7 still some campuses where there are competing
8 responsibilities, and in terms of our aspirational
9 goal, we would like to move to a model based on our
10 task force report recommendation that there be a
11 professional on every campus whose sole
12 responsibility it is to-to serve student veterans.

13 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay. I'm gong to
14 turn it back to my co-Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. I'll ask if
16 any of the members of the Higher Education or
17 Veterans Committee have any questions to let--an
18 opportunity to let the staff know. I have two quick
19 questions, and we'll turn it over to any of our
20 colleagues if they have any further questions. You
21 know we just marked Veterans' Day, and I think it's
22 an important reminder for all of us serving in
23 government and academia to reaffirm our commitment to
24 serving veterans, and not all veterans are the same.
25 Veterans, as you know, in the city reflect the
wonderful diversity that exists here in New York

1 City, and that diversity also happens to be when it
2 comes to matters of opinion. Not only are people
3 just making religious and political perspectives, but
4 also matters of opinion, and in recent weeks there
5 have—there's been a lot of chatter on Twitter and
6 Facebook and social media from veterans that are
7 students in the CUNY system that for whatever reason,
8 and I'm sure we'll hear many of them later, are
9 dissatisfied with the Administration. And I'm just
10 wondering if the Chancellor has offered to meet with
11 any of these students or to convene some sort of
12 round table discussion because I always thought that
13 from my perspective at least, summit diplomacy
14 sometimes works best when people have the ability to
15 express themselves directly with decision makers
16 rather than having to deal with people who are
17 managing veterans affairs at the, you know, middle
18 management level, if you will. So it's a
19 recommendation that I have, but it's one that perhaps
20 has already been in the works, and I don't know.
21 Does—does the Chancellor meet on a yearly basis with
22 the heads of the clubs? Does—does he make himself
23 available to different CUNY leaders that are involved
24 with the veterans outreach?
25

3 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: it's-our

4 Chancellor Chair Ulrich is remarkably proud and
5 supportive of student veterans. On his be-behalf,
6 I've met with a group of students veterans that have
7 raised some concerns. They're serious concerns. We
8 treat the concerns very seriously. They're-they're
9 in the form of a complaint. So to protect the due
10 process of both the students who have lodged these
11 complaints and-and the people who would be affected
12 by them. We're trying to be very deliberative in in-
13 in our approach to it, and on that same campus there-
14 there may have been multiple campuses, but I have
15 know on one particular campus tomorrow actually
16 there's a town hall meeting posted by their senior
17 administration to allow all key stakeholders who care
18 about student veteran to be able to-to-to share
19 their-their concerns, and recommendations, and to
20 compliment the college when they've gotten it right
21 all in the spirit of moving the college and our
22 university forward to improve its capacity to better
23 serve veterans. So, but I will share the
24 recommendation with the Chancellor, and I know he
25 would be honored to-to-to meet with our student
veterans. We're very proud of that.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I-I appreciate that.
3 I-I think that it's important that people feel like
4 they're being heard, and people can disagree without
5 being disagreeable. It's not to say that, you know,
6 one side is right or that there are only two sides.
7 There may be more than two sides, but the point is
8 the Chancellor I think should institute some sort of
9 yearly round table discussions with perhaps the
10 presidents of the clubs where they have around
11 Veterans' Day perhaps, or some other day that's
12 convenient for him where people have the opportunity
13 to meet with him for an hour to talk to him to say
14 hey this is what we think CUNY is doing great. This
15 is what we think needs improvement. I don't think it
16 would hurt anybody, and I think it would go a long
17 way diffuse some of the chatter. Again, I'll call it
18 chatter for what it is, and that's—that's been going
19 around. Finally, another recommendation I have for
20 you before we wrap it up with my co-chair is that the
21 City Council has an enormous under this Speaker and
22 this Administration has put together an enormous
23 package of grant funding that we make available for
24 veterans groups in the city, and we fund groups that
25 provide legal services like NYLAG and Legal Services

1
2 NYC specifically tailored for veterans. We provide
3 funding for mental health services at NYU Langone
4 because as you know, they have a-a terrific institute
5 there for military and former military members and
6 their families, and that actually is very helpful
7 because the VA doesn't serve everybody. So we talk
8 about the VA. The VA only serves honorably discharged
9 veterans. There are veterans who have other than
10 honorable discharges who cannot get services from the
11 VA, and who probably are in CUNY. So I hope that you
12 would avail yourself of that. But the point is that
13 we don't fund anything in CUNY, and maybe we might be
14 willing to consider that next year, but we would like
15 to have an off-the-record conversation with you about
16 what type of package we could put together to fill
17 the gaps in funding to provide services for students
18 who are former service members in CUNY. So the
19 budget process is starting. You have some funding
20 from Robin Hood or Home Depot or wherever. You have
21 some funding from the State. You have some funding
22 that you might put in, but there are things that we
23 might be willing to fund as well, and we would like
24 to work very closely with you on that.

3 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: We would
4 appreciate that very much, and it gives us the
5 advance time to engage all of our stakeholders to
6 hear from them how they think those investments might
7 be made most impactful on behalf of our student
8 veterans. So we thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for that.
10 Thank you, Madam Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. Just a
12 few final questions. We know that the task force
13 published a report in 2013 regarding policies to
14 facilitate the transition from the military to the
15 educational environment. Does that task force still
16 continue to meet?

17 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: Chair Barron, it-
18 it hasn't met, and this is not an excuse or an alibi,
19 but I'm-I'm-I'm still new to the role. My-the
20 interim role, and I'm entering my fourth month and on
21 my list of priorities just because I'm reorienting
22 myself to [coughing] our key areas of service
23 veterans being at the top, would be to, in fact, re-
24 engage the chair of that committee and-and the
25 steering committee just to begin to look back at our
progress on the task force reports, and begin to look

1 going forward about the additional work that we need
2 to do. So I appreciate the recommendation, and—and
3 we will do this in short order. I think [coughing]
4 President Wallerstein has now taken leadership of
5 that task force, and—and I would look forward to—to
6 meeting with him to talk about re-engaging in the
7 steering committee to revisit the task force
8 recommendation and our progress.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So I recently had a
11 hearing on the Master Plan, and since the task force
12 has not been functioning, how are you working to meet
13 the objective of the Master Plan which says identify
14 and expand high impact practices of veteran students.
15 How are you going to do that?

16 VICE CHANCELLOR ROSA: I think that to
17 your point revisiting the recommendations would be an
18 important first step, but from engaging our key
19 stakeholders routinely as we do through COBA, the—the
20 Council on Veterans Affairs was able to funnel up and
21 identify what are the university's high impact
22 practices, Project PROVE being one of them, and I'm—
23 I'm eager for you to hear from our colleagues from
24 PROVE. So it's—it's programs like that where
25 particularly those where we're able to invest in

3 CUNY's students empowering student veterans, which-
4 which we would like as-as one of our priorities.

5 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, and finally to
6 the student panelists, what kind of services and
7 support did you receive as a student veteran, and
8 what kind of financial aid would-did you need other
9 financial aid beyond just being able to not have to
10 pay the tuition, and how many of your experience-what
11 type of experiences did you have were accepted for
12 credits, if any?

13 VANESSA CORDERO: So I'll start with the
14 first-there--for the funding. I was all just sort of
15 post 9/11, which is what I've been using in order to
16 go to school.

17 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I'm sorry. Say that
18 again.

19 VANESSA CORDERO: The post 9/11.

20 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

21 VANESSA CORDERO: That bill is what is
22 helping me go to school and fund.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Is there any other
24 financial aid that you're receiving?

25 VANESSA CORDERO: I currently work. So I
manage my work and using the post 9/11 as well.

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

4 VANESSA CORDERO: In regards to the help
5 that I receive, with them we're seeing the staff is
6 incredible. I work with Master Chief Cotto, and any
7 problems that I had I would go to him. He would
8 refer me somebody that was specifically veteran
9 oriented, and would know how to assist in with
10 whatever problem they had. Also, we do have like the
11 Master Chief stated, we have somebody. We have
12 counselors there that when we do have problems we can
13 speak to somebody, and if they can't help us, then
14 you would always refer us to somebody. I know in my
15 instance I had a situation where I was failing
16 classes because I had to care for my father, and I
17 was able to go to Master Chief. He was able to
18 advocate for me and assist me with that, and we were
19 able to speak to my professors and get me through to
20 ultimately graduate, and maintain my degree. In
21 regards to your last question can you repeat it?

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Was any of your
23 military service able to be credited through CUNY,
24 and if so, what was that?

25 VANESSA CORDERO: So at BMCC most of your
credits are going to be the requirements that you

1 need. SO I wasn't able to use my military experience
2 there. However, when I went to John Jay, I was able
3 to provide a transcript, which is JSP. You go online
4 and it pretty much breaks down your experience, and
5 your-whatever training you received in the military,
6 and I brought that over to John Jay, and they were
7 able to give me credits for my experience.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, thank you so
10 much.

11 VANESSA CORDERO: Thank you. [background
12 comments]

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So we saw that. So
14 there are no members of the committee who have signed
15 up to testify. So I want to thank you for your--each
16 of you for your testimony today, and we'll move onto
17 the first panel if that's okay with you, Madam Chair.
18 Okay. So, the second panel will consist of the
19 following individuals. Leo-Leo Assi-Leora Shudofsky.
20 Is that okay? Alright, pretty good. Joseph Bello,
21 Noah Almo-Almon-Al-Almanor-Almanor. Okay, sorry
22 about that. Almanor. I apologize and Ricky Malone.
23 Nice to see you. I apologize if I mispronounce your
24 name. I am-I am the victim of that myself all the
25 time. So I can sympathize with you. [pause]

[background comments] It's up to. This a a-ladies
first, please. Thank you. [pause]

LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Okay. [pause] Thank
you. Good afternoon members of the City Council
Veterans Committee and Higher Education Committee.
Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name
is Leora Shudofsky. I am a social worker, proud
graduate of Queens College and Hunter College School
of Social Work, which is now the Silberman School of
Social work. But I am currently the Co-Director of
PROVE, Project for Return Opportunity and Veterans
Education based out Silberman School of Social Work,
and I've been part of the project since 2008. My co-
director, Dr. Raja Sherwood is a Vietnam era veteran,
and has worked with the veteran community and New
York City for over 30 years, as well as having been a
co-professor at Silberman School of Social Work, one
of two veterans on faculty. He also worked for many
years at the VA in Montrose where he counseled
vetermans-veterans with Post Traumatic Stress. In
2007, in response to the record number of veterans
returning home and enrollment in higher education an
initiative was launched from the CUNY Offices of
Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. As a

3 result of that initiative that year, Dr. Sherwood and
4 the then university Dean of Enrollment Management,
5 Robert Patrick, a fellow veteran and long-time
6 veteran advocate established PROVE, whose mission is
7 to enhance existing services for student veterans on
8 select CUNY campuses and to support the veterans in
9 their transition from military service to college
10 life and beyond. PROVE accomplishes this through an
11 innovative service model utilized in graduate social
12 work interns, experienced social work field
13 instructors in conjunction with student veteran peer
14 mentors working on these CUNY host campuses in
15 assisting their transition academically, socially and
16 emotionally. I have a diagram attached at the end of
17 the model—that shows the model. We're also gratified
18 to add to our mission training the next generation of
19 social workers to be culturally competent in serving
20 those who serve. PROVE started on two CUNY campuses,
21 Hunter College and John Jay College with two
22 graduated social interns—social work interns placed
23 at each, and with the placement at the then beginning
24 Office of—of COBA, CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs,
25 under the supervision of Wilfred Cotto. That office
was first there. PROVE started with a close

1 collaboration with COBA, which continues through
2 today. Over the year, we've expanded to the CUNY
3 Community colleges including BCC, BMCC, Hostos, La
4 Guardia, and QCC. That's five out of seven. PROVE
5 has been located at seven campuses with a cohort of
6 14 graduate student intern serving on an average
7 1,200 unique student veterans each academic year
8 since 2012. This year, as VC Rosa said, we dropped
9 from seven through various financial constraints.
10 I'm sorry. We've had to take a step back and pare
11 down to seven campuses. Our goal is to expand that
12 from four to seven next year, we hope to grow beyond
13 these campuses because we know that the value of our
14 model matches up with the needs of CUNY student
15 veterans especially at this time of leaning public
16 interest and dollars through veteran schools. PROVE
17 has been fortunate to have some consisting-consistent
18 financial support from CUNY, and from individual
19 campuses that we serve. And we've been able to raise
20 funds from the Robin Hood from 2012 through present,
21 and the Bob Woodruff, in 2014 through 2016 to help
22 expand our program and service delivery. But our
23 support from Robin Hood will end in 2017, and our
24 grant was not removed from the Woodruff due to a
25

1 change in their funding priorities. So, we're at a
2 crossroads in terms of where do we go. I'm saying
3 over the next ten years we need to change it. (sic)
4 One of the most valuable piece-pieces of our program
5 is utilizing student veteran care mentors both paid
6 and volunteer as well as our graduate social work
7 interns to help the student veterans make critical
8 social connections with other veterans on their
9 campus. Their shared experience is rekindling a type
10 of camaraderie that they may have had in the military
11 and not since them with the Council role in (sic)
12 helping transition. In shaping the project service
13 delivery model, PROVE recognized that many veterans
14 hesitate to seek formalized mental health services.
15 Veterans may also be wary of what motivates civilians
16 to offer their help. On the other hand, we've
17 observed that veterans tend to relax in the presence
18 of other veterans to more readily share their life
19 experience, and to be inspired to help fellow
20 veterans. As a result, PROVE is co-located in the
21 campus Veteran Resource Center. Sharing the space
22 gives us a greater chance for success with fostering
23 engagement for the student veterans as well as for
24 them to find the opportunity to connect with the
25

1
2 company of their peers. A trusting relationships
3 builds the platform for PROVE to provide concrete
4 services to the student veterans that aid in their
5 educational success such as helping navigate their
6 educational benefits or offering academic support.
7 Trusts also allows us to offer emotional support and
8 create the linkages to other resources when
9 necessary. We have referred student veterans to
10 professionals both on campus and in the community
11 with whom we have developed relationships with over
12 the years, and we need to personally recommend them
13 whenever possible. That's the one hand-off model.
14 We don't want to call and just send someone and say
15 hey go to the VA. We call and say this is the person
16 that you're going to be meeting with, and then we
17 call the other end. To that end, part of our work to
18 enhancing—enhancing existing services on campus
19 relies on creating a synergy around the various
20 departments on campus and the professionals who staff
21 them such as academic advising, counseling,
22 accessibility registrar and the bursar, the bursar's
23 office. PROVE's staff develops relationships with the
24 staff and these offices, and the veteran
25 knowledgeable points of contact to help to streamline

3 administrative processes to serve the student
4 veterans' needs better and more efficiently. In a
5 fast paced academic setting, we find that our
6 strength based approach better serves the student
7 veterans who are likely to be busy or overwhelmed and
8 can benefit from short-term practical support such as
9 coping skills development and stress reduction
10 techniques. For students with more--student veterans
11 with more extensive needs, we ensure that our staff
12 is informed and placed to advise. We have mandatory
13 bi-weekly special educational and military cultural
14 competency training for our graduate intern provirat
15 (sic) and our field instructors. As both the
16 literature and anecdotal experience shows, there is a
17 continued stigma around seeking help and services for
18 most veterans. One of the reasons that the approved
19 model works is because it meets student veterans
20 where they are literally at the campus Resource
21 Center. Our student veterans have applied. They've
22 found purpose in assisting fellow veterans, which is
23 of the military culture, and that to help themselves
24 in the process. Many of our graduate interns have
25 gone on to work with veterans either in the second
year internship or after graduation. Twenty percent

1 of our graduate interns since 2007 to 2008 now work
2 at the VA within CUNY or other veteran service
3 organizations. We have about 100 students that have
4 graduated from-through our programs. As I mentioned
5 before, the public interest and funding for
6 organizations working with veterans is on a downward
7 turn. We need to be creative in reshaping the future
8 of veteran services at CUNY. The fact that every
9 campus, every CUNY campus has a staff person who is
10 dedicated three-quarter or full time to serving
11 student veterans is a tremendous achievement. We
12 can't rest on that achievement alone, and we cannot
13 afford as a community and an institution of prior
14 learning to lessen our focus and our services. In
15 key times, CUNY as in many other academic
16 institutions allowed its services to veterans to
17 shrink to almost nothing because of the drop in
18 identified student veterans on campus. In 2009, CUNY
19 experienced a 233% jump in veteran enrollment due in
20 large part to the new post-9/11 GI Bill, but also to
21 the CUNY leadership specifically COBA and strong
22 support from veterans within the CUNY administration
23 such a Dean Patrick and Wilfred. Although student
24 veteran enrollments at CUNY may be at its peak right
25

3 now in the post 9/11 era, we may be seeing a plateau
4 over the next years, but not a diminishment, and with
5 time and experience behind us, we have a better idea
6 of what kind of services beyond the academic students
7 need to be successful at all educational levels from
8 the associate degree to a doctoral degree. I've been
9 privileged over the last eight plus years to work
10 with veterans who started at one of the community—one
11 of the CUNY community colleges, and have successfully
12 completed master degrees in education or social work
13 or a business or nursing and more. I also know that
14 some of these veterans look at their experiences on
15 campus and the communities and resources that they
16 found that met their need as the new population
17 invaluable in their success. Thank you again for
18 your time.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
20 testimony. One of the continuum in the order that we
21 called folks up, I think Joe Bello was—who was
22 second? Do you have those sheets? I apologize.
23 [background comments] Joe and then—and then we'll
24 continue. Okay. Thank you.

25 JOE BELLO: Thank you for giving me the
opportunity to testify today. I'm going to make two

1
2 points before I go into my testimony. As you well
3 know, I am a member of the New York City Veterans
4 Advisory Board. For a point of information, I am the
5 secretary. Sam Innocent (sp?) who is also on the
6 Board is here. The student veterans at La Guardia
7 Community College did come forth at one point in time
8 during the year, and asked us to look into what was
9 going on at the campus. We then referred the letter
10 to Commissioner Sutton and her team at BDS to take a
11 look into it, and for information we are expecting
12 report back from them on November 30th at our last VA
13 meeting in Manhattan. So, hopefully, we'll have
14 some-some further answers then at that time, but we
15 wanted to make you aware of that as well. So let me
16 start by saying thank you for giving me the
17 opportunity to speak today regarding services for
18 veterans at BMCC. I say that because that's
19 basically what we just heard, Veteran Services at
20 BMCC. I think it must be pointed out that Mr. Cotto
21 was the University Director for the college, for the
22 campus at CUNY, and he took that institutional
23 knowledge and the veterans model and he went to BMCC
24 where he had a supportive administration and he was
25 able to create a campus that is thriving with over

1 400 veterans. That's remarkable, and that's
2 fantastic for him, but that's not what's happening on
3 the other campuses. We take a look at Baruch College
4 for example, where they don't have—they don't have
5 such a supportive administration. They don't even
6 have a director or a core data for veteran services.
7 Yet, every campus in CUNY does except for them.
8 That's an item that was listed in CUNY's Task Force
9 Report. So that is really disappointing. So we ask
10 what happened with this report three years later.
11 You know, what items have been, and we heard today
12 about what's happening. So what—what often gets
13 missed is that I often like you say CUNY Central is
14 like a kingdom, the central part. The Chancellor the
15 King, he sends directives, policies to the princes
16 and princesses of the—of the college—of his kingdom.
17 Those are the presidents. These princesses (sic)
18 receive the directives. They acknowledge them, and
19 then they look into the areas of them depending upon
20 how supportive those directives actually—directives
21 actually are. So one of the fundamental problems
22 with instituting a policy is you need personnel to
23 carry it out. While the number of veterans attending
24 at CUNY has increased, and we've all agreed upon
25

1 that, the number of staff at CUNY central office has
2 decreased and you heard yourself that it's basically
3 one full-time student, a half time, I mean one full-
4 time a half time and work study students. That's not
5 enough. In 2009, there was 1,700 veteran-student
6 veterans. Now we have over 3,000 and yet we only
7 have a staff of one. Even Mr. Cotto had a staff of
8 two. So that has to be addressed. That has to be
9 addressed immediately, and because of what you heard
10 and the lack of personnel enforcement, CUNY Colleges
11 some they have a hodgepodge of services. Some
12 campuses are doing well. Again, you heard BMCC.
13 They're doing fantastic. So others have the bare
14 minimum, and all are based on each president's regard
15 towards those veterans. As a result, there's
16 actually a disconnect between CUNY Central and the
17 presidents of the campuses, and it becomes difficult
18 for the central office to talk about what they're
19 doing for veterans while veterans on the campuses are
20 saying they're not getting the support, services and
21 resources they need to survive and survive and to
22 see. Without the personnel or the will to make sure
23 those policy changes are being carried out on the
24 campuses, the vet-to the veterans that are here
25

1 listening or on the campuses it's nothing more than
2 talk. This is all optics. Now, let me just also
3 point out that I've know Interim Vice Chancellor Rosa
4 for a number of years now, and I recognize the fact
5 as he's said, he's tried—he's just gotten into the
6 Interim Vice Chancellor position for the last couple
7 of months, and he's trying to get up to speed, but
8 he has been in the veterans' space for a while as
9 well, and so I look forward to working with him or
10 trying to help him bridge these gaps and get this
11 thing moving with CUNY that's really overdue.
12 However, we also have to understand all of us here
13 that we are approaching critical mass, and the more
14 the word gets out about what CUNY is not doing, the
15 more the veterans hear the—about what's going on
16 campuses, the more they will not be inclined to
17 attend, the more the veterans struggle on campuses,
18 you say they support for often no resources, the
19 higher their attrition rate will be, and the more
20 veterans move to those campuses like BMCC who do
21 provide those services. I, therefore, urge CUNY
22 Central to put additional resources into its office,
23 to hire personnel and start engaging the college and
24 presidents as to why they're not carrying out the
25

1 task force recommendations. If they cannot do this,
2 I would recommend that the State Legislator and the
3 City Calendar-Council hold up any money it gives for
4 veteran services. I will need to have a conversation
5 with its Board of Trustees. In regards to what's
6 happening at La Guardia, in full disclosure, I worked
7 at La Guardia Veterans Office for over 15 years with
8 then Director Sam Farrell. I left in 2013, and I
9 continue to help the veterans at the Upward Bound
10 program where my wife, a Navy veteran herself, is the
11 current director. I personally believe that the
12 individual that we are not talking about, Mr. Clark,
13 has had issues dealing with student veterans from the
14 moment he started at La Guardia. One moment he could
15 be cordial, in another he could be staring at you
16 making you feel uncomfortable. In another he could
17 be shaking you hand and the next minute lying to your
18 face. I have witnessed Mr. Clark and Mr. Griffin
19 intimidate student veterans in the office, and I've
20 even had Mr. Clark confront me and give me an
21 expletive when the student veterans suspected--
22 corrected--correctly suspected that Mr. Griffin was
23 spying on them and the club. As the situation got
24 worse, the student veteran reached out to the New
25

1
2 York City Advisory Board. I became concerned about
3 my role. In my testimony you'll see a letter that I
4 sent to Vice President Baston regarding this, which
5 is attached to my testimony. However, the rumors did
6 not stop, and in an office meeting a few months ago,
7 my wife came home very upset stating that Mr. Clark
8 and Mr. Griffin stated that she was the master mind
9 behind all of the troubles that Mr. Clark is having
10 with the students. This is unacceptable. Needless
11 to say, there was so much damage done at La Guardia
12 in three semesters that it has completely overrun
13 what Mr. Farrell worked for in over 40 years at La
14 Guardia when he retired. I find myself deeply
15 ~~depointed~~-disappointed with President Mellow and Vice
16 President Baston. I have met and respected and
17 worked with both of them over the years and they are
18 both honorable people. However, we have to be clear
19 here. They could have diffused the situation at any
20 time the students were trying to engage them over the
21 course of three semesters, but for whatever reasons
22 chose not to. Therefore, from the outside this
23 situation seems to speak of something more, of anger,
24 of pride going before the fall, of supporting an
25 individual with no regards towards other New Yorkers,

1 the rights—and rights of student veteran who pay the
2 CUNY tuition. Sadly, now La Guardia has a civilian-
3 veteran divide problem, and as a result, while CUNY's
4 overall veteran numbers have increased, the veteran
5 numbers at La Guardia have actually decreased. If
6 this situation is not resolved soon, the way the
7 community—the veterans community works, and we know
8 this Council—Councilman Ulrich, La Guardia will have
9 few veterans left. The administration at CUNY and La
10 Guardia seem not to understand that the military
11 ethos about looking out for one's brothers and
12 sisters, and they don't seem to understand that
13 they're dealing with adults. Many of the student
14 vets population are older than—than the regular
15 student population. Many are in their early 30s and
16 even have families. As to what the students will
17 testify, as an advocate, I find myself more concerned
18 about what will happen. Because of these
19 confrontations one of these veterans with mental
20 health issues commit suicide, or assaults Mr. Clark
21 or Mr. Griffin. I want to know who's going to be
22 liable or responsible for that. What kind of cover
23 up are we going to move into then? And that's
24 something I want us all to think about. This
25

3 situation needs to be resolved. Sometimes like they
4 say in Star Trek, the needs of the many outweigh the
5 needs of the few or the one. Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you.

7 Let's move on, and we'll save questions to the end.

8 NOAH ALMANOR: [coughs] Chairman Ulrich,
9 Chairperson Barron, Members of the Veterans and
10 Higher Committee and the Higher Education Committee,
11 thank you for having me up here. My name is Noah
12 Almanor (sp?). I'm a recent graduate of La Guardia
13 Community College, and I currently attend City
14 College and still serve the National Guard as an
15 Infantryman. I served six years of active duty as an
16 Infantryman. I'm grateful to have this opportunity
17 to address all of you today about my experience at
18 CUNY as a combat veteran. I served in Afghanistan
19 from December of 2012 to August 2013 in Kandahar
20 Apartments where I saw the horrors of war first hand.
21 On May 7, 2013, I was on patrol on Highway 1 going
22 towards Attal when my truck came IED. I lost
23 consciousness for some time and was sent to Mentleton
24 (sp?) at Farhabazula (sp?). I received the Purple
25 Heart from my injuries that day at TBI, PTSD as well
as other disorders. I returned to New York from

1 active duty in January 2015, and decided to enroll
2 in the CUNY system. I chose La Guardia Community
3 College because of the Upward Bound program, and
4 after I completed the upward Bound program, I
5 enrolled in—at La Guardia and had a lot of
6 expectations. Unfortunately, these ex—expectations
7 weren't met when Mr. Steven Clark and Mr. Darrel
8 Griffin had other intentions in their minds. For
9 three semesters my hopes and expectations at La
10 Guardia were not met. I was a work study student at
11 the Veterans Resource Center with the intention of
12 helping other veterans have a smooth transition from
13 service to education during my time at La Guardia,
14 but I witnessed Mr. Clark lie and harass other
15 veterans including myself. When I other student
16 veterans saw what Mr. Clark and Mr. Griffin was
17 doing, we asked for a meeting with his boss, Vice
18 President Michael Baston. VP Baston refused to meet
19 with us, and tried to send us back to Mr. Clark. As
20 you saw in the package of correspondence us, La
21 Guardia and CUNY Center, Mr. Clark harassed and
22 oppressed me on my role of signing our no confidence
23 letter. He continued to oppress and harass me on the
24 matter. I finally told him why I signed that
25

1 document, and he harassed me, and I witnessed to the
2 Upward Bound program and the people that were in the
3 Upward Bound program, excuse me, [coughs] but he
4 continued to lie and harass me. I left the office-
5 office in anger. I wrote a statement to Mr. Baston,
6 which the President of Veterans Club sent to him.
7 The Vice President not only did not address my
8 statement, but as you saw in the correspondence he
9 said—he stated that he had no way of knowing who
10 wrote the statement implying that I was lying. I
11 wrote a second email with all my information again
12 reiterating what happened. I have—I have still not
13 received a response from VP Baston or anyone at La
14 Guardia regarding Mr. Clark and his harassment toward
15 me and other veterans. Mr. Clark has violated Title
16 9 policies again and again with free reign, and no
17 one at La Guardia or CUNY including Mr. Rosa has done
18 nothing to rectify the situation. I had addressed
19 CUNY and—CUNY and Interim—excuse me—the Vice
20 Chancellor Rosa, but there has been no resolution to
21 the problem. Mr. Rosa's answer to this problem was
22 to push it back to La Guardia to the very college.
23 He did not want to address this situation from the
24 beginning. At the moment, I am very disgusted at
25

3 CUNY for treating veterans like this, and for so very
4 long. I have seen how empty the veterans office at
5 La Guardia is now, and how veterans are leaving the
6 college for its lack of friendliness and
7 responsiveness to veteran's issues at the college.
8 CUNY and La Guardia will take our GI Bill—GI Bill
9 money for when it's needed (sic) but fails to resolve
10 any of the issues that veterans will bring forth to
11 the table. It's almost as if they're treating us
12 like second class citizens. This must change and
13 CUNY must take complaints from any veteran at any
14 college seriously and address—and address it in a
15 timely manner. I'm asking both committees to hold
16 another hearing next semester to follow up on what
17 actions CUNY and La Guardia has taken to address
18 these issues. I once again thank you, Councilman
19 Ulrich, Council Member Barron and the committee for
20 your time. I am ready to answer any question that
21 you may have. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
23 testimony, and for being here today. We're going to
24 save questions until the end. We have one more
25 person, Mr. Ricky Malone who is here to testify, and
then we'll follow up with some questions.

3 RICKY MALONE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman,
4 thank you Mr. Chairman and other honorable council
5 members. Thank you for your service. You know, just
6 to send that back your way. I'm confident I can
7 speak for me and all the student veterans in
8 attendance here and how pleased we were that you guys
9 called this hearing. It's a pretty difficult
10 struggle for us, and a lot of pleas for help have
11 gone unanswered, and at this point, we've lost all
12 confidence in the Chancellors and CUNY's system—
13 system at large to take responsibility for the—for
14 the veterans within their institution. At this
15 juncture, to piggyback off of Noah, I'm sure that you
16 guys have received the correspondence packets with
17 questionable practices happening not only at La
18 Guardia and Baruch, but the complete systematic
19 failure across the CUNY's network at large. Over
20 three semesters, current and former students of La
21 Guardia have been pleading for action. We've with
22 the Vice Presidents, the Provosts and we've been
23 acknowledged by the President there as well. Those
24 meetings have gotten all to the level of the Vice
25 Chancellor. He did meet with us on this matter
twice. So to say that over three semester that due

1 processes are being taken care of is a little
2 outlandish of the time line in my opinion. But I
3 would like to mention that they've announced the town
4 hall tomorrow the 16th following this hearing around
5 the time the hearing was announced as well. Just to
6 take that as a note. I can't stress enough how
7 appalled I am with the gross injustices toward
8 veterans, and how they're allowed to go on. Reports
9 of harassment, intimidation allowed to sit in the in
10 boxes of those administrators whose very
11 responsibility is to address those, and not acting on
12 those dishonorable acts by those individuals. We've
13 heard several or most of our institutions have these
14 programs and services and resources available to
15 these student veterans. We've heard the number seven
16 thrown around a lot. That's not even half of those
17 institutions. The GI Bill that supplies government
18 funds to returning selfless heroes of this nation was
19 enacted in 1944, roughly 100 years after CUNY's
20 establishment. It's about 70 years with that GI Bill
21 being in effect, and utter failure to—to enact a
22 standardized system that they say they've been
23 working on, 70 years still working on it as little
24 bit of a wide time line there. [pause] As the
25

3 public servants of our city and these veterans, we
4 ask you to take action and echo to need for this
5 protection to prevent this kind of exploitation of
6 our veterans and their educational benefits earned
7 through their sacrifice to this nation. In closing,
8 if as a nation we can possess the audacity to ask
9 these men and women to defend freedom of democracy on
10 foreign battlefields, we must assume the
11 responsibility to them when they return home. Let us
12 make sure here that we don't fail this generation of
13 veterans like we failed so many before. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
15 testimony and I'll—I'll ask if my co-chair has any
16 questions first? I'll defer to her and then I'll—
17 I'll wrap there.

18 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, thank you very
19 much. I'm disappointed and surprised to hear of what
20 it is that your testimony presents to us. I think
21 that especially for veterans as I referenced in my
22 questions to the first panel, there's a certain
23 sensitivity that needs to be present for anyone who's
24 dealing with veterans. That's why I asked was there
25 special training for those social workers who are
involved with working with the veterans and certainly

1 a sensitivity that needs to be present with anyone
2 working in that regard. Without going into what the
3 specifics are that you cite specifically at La
4 Guardia College, do you—are you saying then that the
5 protocols for due process have not been followed, and
6 that they have just been tossed to the wind or to
7 what?
8

9 RICKY MALONE: I believe the—thank you,
10 Chairwoman—I believe the three master semester mark,
11 and how it hasn't been addressed, and how it has
12 gotten to the level of the Vice Chancellor without
13 the Vice President, the Provost or the President of
14 the institution where it was reported had taken no
15 action to get to the level of the Vice Chancellor is
16 a true testament to itself of the lack of due
17 diligence in the situation. As Noah has said, his
18 emails went unresponded. So, yes, I do believe that
19 the pre-presentation of that we're going through the
20 due processes is—

21 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Are there timelines
22 that are connected to each of these steps in the due
23 process that are not being adhered to?

24 RICKY MALONE: As not being a personnel
25 in the CUNY system, I can't answer that. I'm not

3 sure how their timeline works, how when they get a
4 report of something such as intimidation and
5 harassment for how the—a letter of no confidence
6 about individuals allowed to get back to him before a
7 proper investigation enabling him to, in fact,
8 question Mr. Almanor about it, but, you know, as far
9 as the timelines and the practices of those
10 processes, I can't answer for—for CUNY.

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Do we—do we have
12 any—do we know if there's any type of evaluation that
13 veterans have in terms of making an evaluation of
14 those who are conducting the program, and those
15 students have the opportunity toward the end of the
16 semester to evaluate their professors. Do we know if
17 veterans have an opportunity to engage in that kind
18 of evaluation? I think that might be something we
19 might want to consider if, in fact, that's not
20 happening.

21 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: I would just like to
22 point out that much like the implementation of the
23 credit system within CUNY, really each school
24 operates individually. In fact, there are a number
25 of campuses that don't have the title of a Veterans
Coordinator, but have their veterans points of

3 contact with a different person. So, to answer that
4 question, I think no because there isn't a CUNY wide-
5 there's--there are recommendations for things, and
6 there are processes for things, but it really--it--it
7 ends up being up to each individual campus. That has
8 its very positives, and very negatives, and so that
9 there is some.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And at La Guardia,
11 you said your wife is a--no you indicated that Baruch
12 did not have a person on staff. Is that just because
13 it's a vacancy or is it that they're being resistant
14 and non-compliant. Has there been a vacancy for any
15 length of time?

16 JOE BELLO: Well, my understanding is
17 that they haven't, but I do understand there are
18 Baruch students here or veteran students who will
19 testify to that as well.

20 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Okay.

21 JOE BELLO: So they might add more
22 information.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, thank you, Mr.
24 Chair.

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. In the
4 interest of time, I am going to move onto the next
5 panel. So, it's, yes.

6 JOE BELLO: Could I just add one more
7 thing?

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You may.

9 JOE BELLO: I want to talk about the
10 Veteran Friendly designation because I really want to
11 be clear about that. The veteran desig-friendly
12 designation is basically an application that each-
13 each campus puts out. They-they fill out, the sign
14 it, and then they send it off to, you know, the media
15 place, and then they kind of put it in. It's more
16 like a public relations thing. I mean if that's the
17 case, then-then the question that many of the
18 veterans have asked is how did La Guardia get the
19 military friendly designation with yet-with all the
20 problems that were going on, all the letters and
21 stuff like that? I mean, so, you know, just to be
22 clear here, I mean we can say we're military friendly
23 and we can have that designation. That doesn't
24 necessarily make it so.

25 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'm-I'm-I'm curious
to hear about-curious to hear about the experiences

1 students are having a Baruch because I myself am on
2 track to graduate in two months from Baruch, the
3 School of Public Affairs so—I'm in the MPA program
4 thee. I'm actually writing a—my capstone on the
5 Veteran Treatment Course, which you can all read
6 about in a few months when it's completer, and anyway
7 that's a whole other course. But I think the one
8 that has certainly come out of this hearing. There
9 are many interesting things, but there is definitely
10 a need for uniformity in the awarding of credits, and
11 the policies of how we treat and serve veterans. And
12 I'm hoping that as a result of this hearing, and the
13 town hall meeting that CUNY does tomorrow that some
14 recommendations or guidelines will be implemented,
15 but I've been advised by legal counsel not to make
16 any public statement about any ongoing investigation
17 regarding any particular complaints because people
18 are, in fact, entitled to due process in not only
19 CUNY but also in public service as well. So, you
20 won't hear any comments come from me with regard to
21 the case, but I want to thank you for testifying and
22 for sharing your unique experiences with us. We're
23 going to move onto the next.
24
25

3 LEORA SHUDOFISKY: [interposing] Could I
4 just-

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --panel.

6 LEORA SHUDOFISKY: The Chairwoman had
7 asked some questions to the Vice Chancellor about
8 PROVE. If there's anything that I can answer that I
9 haven't covered in my testimony I'm more than happy
10 to. You asked the seven or it's-it's not, though.

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes.

12 LEORA SHUDOFISKY: -- it's not, though.

13 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay. Oh, right.
14 You said your funding has been reduced.

15 LEORA SHUDOFISKY: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: How does that assess
17 the services that you-other than---

18 LEORA SHUDOFISKY: Wait, the-the-the core
19 campuses where we've maintained the same program we
20 elected to go with the four campuses at the level
21 that we're able to provide, which is this bi-weekly
22 training, the-the past supervisors on campus able to
23 really support the student veterans and the graduate
24 interns, and we had to pull from the other three
25 campuses, because we did not have the personnel that
26 were qualified to supervise the social work students,

3 and in—in one case not—weren't sure about whether we
4 were welcome or not there.

5 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And in terms of the
6 funding that you need--

7 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: --what sources are
9 you targeting to get those funds?

10 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Right, what we're doing
11 we're asking and we're very aggressive about this,
12 and we have received over the last almost ten years
13 about \$2 million that we fund raised from
14 organizations like the Robin Hood and the Loga
15 Foundation. We are—we are actively seeking
16 assistance whether it's, you know, the City Council
17 has an interesting idea. We are proposing to CUNY
18 because we figured out the—the barest minimum that we
19 need for each campus to get this kind of--

20 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

21 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: --enhancement, and it's
22 not—it's not used up. (sic)

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So we'd be—I'd be
24 interested to see that report.

25 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: I'd be more than happy
to pass it to you.

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And finally, you
4 talked about entering and that you belong to other
5 types positions. What are some of the positions
6 titles that you hold?

7 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Oh, it's great. I mean
8 actually we have a couple of—of former social work
9 interns at the PROVE program that are now veteran
10 coordinators at some of the colleges within CUNY and
11 also at the new school we have veterans who are—I
12 just had lunch up at Silberman School of Social
13 Workers with 13 veterans, two of whom were—were
14 interns who are now working at the VA, whether it's
15 the VA in—in Montrose, the VA in the Bronx or the VA
16 system in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Jericho project a
17 number of other veteran related programs or programs,
18 social service programs that have a veteran
19 component. And we are—the—the goal is really just to
20 sensitize us as a profession, educators and the
21 social workers to understand that there are—there are
22 just some unique characteristics of the veteran
23 population that need to be recognized. It's one
24 thing for the higher education institution to
25 recognize it, and for us as social workers we need to
also recognize that it's not only about very

3 important issues that you GC (sic) and CBI, but it's
4 the strength and the leadership and the resiliency
5 that veterans bring that we need to recognize. We
6 look at things from a trans based lens rather than a
7 pathological one. That's just our philosophy.

8 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.

9 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Madam
11 Chair, and again thank you for those who came. And
12 so far we have one last panel, is that? Oh, two more
13 panels. Forgive me. Okay. So, now we are going to
14 hear from my fellow students at Baruch College. I
15 brought my ID with me just to prove that [laughter]
16 if you ever see me running late to class maybe you
17 can hold the gate open for me. Melissa Sue from
18 Baruch College Student Affairs; Trent Coyle a Baruch
19 College Student Affairs; Yonadi Reyes.

20 YONADI REYES: Yonadi.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yonadi, I apologize,
22 I-I-I-again, I do apologize. Loren Patterson from La
23 Guardia Community College. So we have three, Baruch
24 Terriers and one from La Guardia Community College.
25 We're missing one—where is the report?

PANEL MEMBER: [off mic] Is that mine?

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh, I apolo-oh, I
4 apologize. Okay, alright, very good, and why don't
5 we start with you, sir? Feel free to just put the
6 microphone on, state your name and-and begin your
7 testimony?

8 LOREN PATTERSON: Alright. [coughs] Good
9 afternoon, everybody. I don't know the proper way to
10 phrase everybody. Thanks for being here. [mic
11 squawking back] So, I'm going to give a different
12 type-type of testimony because I heard a lot of
13 things about credits.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Just state your
15 name. I apologize. State your name for the record.

16 LOREN PATTERSON: Oh, Loren-Loren
17 Patterson.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Okay,
19 for the record. Thank you.

20 LOREN PATTERSON: I have a lot about
21 credits and procedural things and stuff that doesn't
22 identify what I think the problem is dealing with the
23 veteran community throughout CUNY. On January 3,
24 2002, my daughter died. On January 6, 2002, I went
25 to a meeting. (sic) Not because I couldn't with I
had to deal with, but because my Badder Brothers

1 Union and my unit meeting, my soldier's meeting.
2
3 There was—there is a bond with such community. There
4 is a sense of belonging in the veteran community that
5 people who do not understand, have never served, have
6 done nothing outside, and that type community will
7 never understand. And I—I hear about this university
8 doing this, this university doing, this university
9 don't know. And anybody talking about the
10 differences and the unique situation every individual
11 veteran presents, but what she lacks to understand is
12 what we have in common. We volunteer to do for
13 others. We volunteer to be a part of the community.
14 So to ignore the sense of community as big as CUNY
15 is, I just found out about a town hall that's
16 happening tomorrow, and I graduated out of La
17 Guardia. I'm still a CUNY student. The fact that I
18 didn't know that information was happening, and my
19 son goes to that school, there's a problem. The fact
20 that we don't talk past these certain mixers (sic) is
21 a problem. When I started at La Guardia I went to La
22 Guardia because of the veterans that were a block
23 over (sic). I did it because I thought to go to
24 college. I was like this would be cool. Because of
25 the phone call they gave me to come in and to go pick

1
2 up a certificate to say hey, you want to go to
3 school, to walk me downstairs to admissions, to walk
4 me to the guy who did my paperwork for financial
5 services. In one day I was able to take my test, and
6 everything to be admitted to La Guardia Community
7 College, and because of that program is why I'm
8 currently working on my bachelor's, and next that's
9 the hope that I will be working on my masters. But
10 the thing that brought me there was the community. I
11 went there. I didn't need to go there for study. I
12 didn't need to go there for—to borrow a book. I went
13 there to talk to my fellow veterans. I went there to
14 be around people who did what I did. Now, at another
15 school, and I go back to La Guardia, and the room
16 it's beautiful and dark, it's nicely painted, a nice
17 TV. There's new computers. There's the couches, but
18 I go in there and I don't talk to anybody. I see
19 Vickie. She's not here. I see Joe when we fought in
20 the war together and over there, but there was no
21 sense of community. I went there to do work. I
22 could have stayed home. I left my house for the
23 purpose of being in a community environment to do
24 work, show camaraderie or something. It wasn't
25 there. It was lacking and that got taken out of the

1 room that I used to go to even if I was five minutes
2 late to class to get a slice of pizza or get cupcake
3 or to say what's up, or some of my bad brothers and
4 went downstairs and we smoked a cigarette. The fact
5 that you can look at—for anybody listening, for
6 anybody in power, for anybody, you know, with the
7 idea of what you're doing. The fact that you look at
8 this community of individuals who did more than any
9 number can show, and you look at us as numbers is a
10 distinct problem. Because what we represent is a
11 better sense of the communities you want to serve.
12 The individuals you want to graduate from your school
13 are the people you want to go into communities and
14 help better the communities, and these are people who
15 do this—did this out of sacrifice for something,
16 sacrifice of family, friends, and everything they
17 love. And to take that and not put that as the main
18 factor over these numbers of positive possible
19 credits you could get for a class, I did nuclear
20 biological chemicals or whatever in no time. I'm not
21 doing that as the rainfall.(sic) Getting a credit
22 for that does nothing for that does nothing for me.
23 The—the essence of what I did and who I am is what
24 CUNY and those representative funding programs need
25

1 to be focusing on. Because that battle buddies just
2 like when my daughter died and I went to my unit
3 because my friends needed me, my battle buddies
4 needed me, those are individuals you can turn to when
5 you're failing the class, when you're not showing up,
6 when you're not there every week. When we're having
7 a pizza, and you're not showing up for the pizza, why
8 are you not there? That's what makes me turn up.
9 That's how you get the graduation rates. That's how
10 you get better numbers. That's how you get more-more
11 return on our resume. That's how you build your
12 enrollees by having that community of people who bond
13 together beyond anything. If one person had thought
14 of was everybody has a dollar, and that's the thing.
15 You're taking out of all this analysis and all this
16 talking that you're doing when it comes to
17 identifying and recognizing who the veteran community
18 is. Thank you, everybody.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Thank
21 you, and please stay for questions at the end. We'll
22 continue.

23 YONADI REYES: Chairperson Ulrich,
24 Chairperson Barron, members of the Veterans and
25 Higher Education Committee, good afternoon. My name

1 is Yonadi Reyes, and I'm a veteran currently
2 attending Baruch College. Today, I stand here before
3 you like every other veteran in this room who wishes
4 to address the adversity they are facing within
5 their—within their prospective schools. It is
6 disheart—disheartening to see that our CUNY schools
7 have failed us. They have failed to help with our
8 transitions by not giving us the proper guidance,
9 inspiration and the tools to help us succeed. Coming
10 into Baruch, I was informed that veterans get
11 preference to seeing academic advisors. When I tried
12 to utilize this service, I was only seen for five
13 minutes. When it happened—when I came out of there
14 just—I came out of there just as clueless as—as I did
15 as I went in. Thereafter, I visited the Academic
16 Advisory Department several times, and was
17 unsuccessfully able to get the proper guidance I need
18 on responsiveness or the overflowing of students in
19 the office for OSHA waiting to be seen. Between
20 emailing an advisor and trying to set up an
21 appointment for the Department, I quickly realize it
22 was futile—futile because they do not set
23 appointments, and the advisors were not receptive to
24 emails. Now, this may seem as an—as an insignificant
25

3 issue, but I can assure you that it's quite the
4 contrary. Academic advisement is like the sun is to
5 a plant. It provides that-that regiment (sic) and
6 growth. Good advising can provide students
7 opportunity to interact with their professional
8 advisors, feel more connected to the institute-
9 institute-excuse me institution. [laughs] I can't
10 get it out. To clarify course selection and serve as
11 an educate-educational checkup. Furthermore, it can
12 also help students to keep their degree requirements
13 in an efficient manner. The advisor can clarify
14 degree requirements and make recommendations
15 regarding specific classing-classes. Academic
16 advisors play a vital role in students' success at
17 school. More importantly, though, like all college
18 at CUNY, we do not have a veteran coordinator at
19 Baruch. We need a veteran coordinator who is
20 committee to recruiting, enrolling and retaining
21 student veterans. We need a coordinator-or a
22 coordinator who understands that we-who understands
23 what we go through, and who can work in collaboration
24 with the various office on campus including students
25 of fierce (sic) admission, disability service,
financial aid, registrar, and others to assist us in

1
2 becoming acclimated to college life while obtaining
3 not only our educational benefits, but our available
4 resources in New York City. This is the biggest
5 failure at Baruch, and as a student it isn't our job
6 to do added work. Lastly, before I conclude my
7 speech, I also wanted to mention an important issue,
8 which you'll face at Baruch. As a student—as a
9 student veteran who is also part of the Student
10 Veteran Association Club, we are receiving absolutely
11 zero help setting up events or even getting a word
12 out on the campus to attract more student veterans.
13 Currently, we are doing all the work by ourselves,
14 and we are the ones who are growing the space. Thank
15 you for hearing me out.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

17 TRENT COYLE: Chairperson Ulrich,
18 Chairperson Barron and members of the Veterans and
19 the Higher Education Committee. Good afternoon. My
20 name is Trent Coyle. I'm a US Army veteran, a
21 service disabled veteran, a veteran of multiple tours
22 of Iraq and Afghanistan. I serve as the Executive
23 Vice President of the Baruch Student Veterans
24 Association. I'm here before you today to address
25 two of the major issues that plague our organization

1 and the attempt to perform our duties of serving the
2 Baruch Student Veterans Association. The most
3 pressing as our need for a veteran's coordinator, an
4 asset that we've been in dire need of for some time.
5 Second, and perhaps more than stressful is the
6 rapidly decaying relationship within the student
7 veterans themselves, and much of the Baruch staff and
8 faculty. Due to a lack of a dedicated coordinator
9 for Baruch SVA, they have become increasingly
10 overwhelmed with the rate of our veterans, the proper
11 resources available to them, as well as fulfilling
12 our duties to selected offices and performing our
13 requirements of students. At no point should those
14 who have volunteered to continue serving the veteran
15 community have to regularly decide whether to
16 complete our daily academic responsibilities versus
17 the assistance with the veterans. A dedicate--a
18 dedicated veterans coordinator, an essential asset
19 that President Wallerstein himself was made aware of
20 in 2013 eliminates this problem. Yet, despite our
21 overtures and the fact that we're the only CUNY
22 school without such a position in place he has
23 continued deny or even meet with us to discuss this
24 issue. This is absolutely unacceptable. Lastly, the
25

3 partnership between the veteran community within
4 Baruch and the staff at Baruch College itself through
5 the Office of Student Life, the Senate for Academic
6 Advisement, the Union of Students Office, the Vice
7 President of Student Affairs Office and President
8 Wallerstein's office has been an increasingly
9 challenged. Despite the rhetoric, very little has
10 been done to provide the promised services to student
11 veterans, and they have, in fact, become an active
12 road block for us to accomplish this. It has become
13 increasingly clear when you are being exploited when
14 the intent of establishing Baruch as veteran
15 conversation. (sic) I ask for your cooper-
16 collaboration in rectifying these pressing issues.
17 Undoubtedly, with your cooperation we can better
18 uphold our sacred responsibility of caring for
19 veterans that have already sacrificed so much for the
20 community. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

22 MELISSA SUE: Hello, Chairperson Ulrich,
23 Chairperson Barron and members of the Veterans and
24 Higher Education Committee. Good afternoon. My name
25 is Melissa Sue. I served in the United States Marine
Corps from 2009 to 2015. I deployed twice and

1 received multiple decorations for operations in
2 Helmand Province Afghanistan and supportive
3 operations Journey Freedom. However, upon coming
4 home, I was diagnosed with PTSD, severe anxiety and
5 memory loss due to a TBI. I graduated from Bronx
6 Community College and followed CUNY schools in 2015.
7 I am now attending Baruch College and Recruitment
8 Service President of the Student Veterans
9 Association. I am here today with my fellow student
10 veterans to address some of the issues we're
11 currently having at Baruch. First and foremost, we
12 do not have a veterans coordinator. Currently, every
13 college within CUNY has either a coordinator or a
14 director for Veteran Services except for us. This is
15 unacceptable. We find ourselves overwhelmed with
16 responsibilities of ensuring that our veterans are
17 provided with specific resources ranging from housing
18 placement in dorms, professional career services,
19 financial support, academic advisement and
20 coordination among various departments at Baruch
21 College. Back in April of 2013, the President of the
22 college Mitchell Wallerstein was part of a blue
23 ribbon panel that put together—put together by then
24 CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein regarding best
25

practices for campus services for student veterans.

One recommendation outlined is every campus should have a single point of contact identified as veterans coordinator. As stated in the report, this individual should be highly knowledgeable about a broad spectrum of veteran topics and maintain relationships with each administrative office on campus and foster community—continuity—excuse me—and a collective knowledge base of issues affecting veterans. To date, the Vice President of Student Affairs has dismissed our request for a Veterans Coordinator despite our proposals for funding.

Furthermore, President Wallerstein has not agreed to a meeting with our students--student veterans to discuss concerns about having a veteran coordinator. Our next issue is a lack of space for veterans at the college. Student veterans' participation on campus has increased by six times since January of this year. The Veterans Resource Center is really only a lounge that is so small that only ten people can fit comfortable. We have constantly asked for a bigger space, and have been told by the Administration that they have nothing. As Key's Blue Ribbon Report noted, the unique nature of the military experience

1 and the strong need for peer support means that the
2 veteran specific spaces are important for veterans—
3 excuse me—student veterans with that. And because we
4 don't have a bigger space, we have no location for
5 Baruch to create a place for centralized veteran
6 services, i.e., a coordinator, certifying official
7 and for the majority of our student veterans.
8 Lastly, Baruch College campus services including the
9 Office of Student Life, Center for Academic
10 Advisement, Dean of Students Office, the Vice
11 President of Student Affairs Office and President
12 Wallerstein's Office does not provide supportive
13 services for our student veterans. Student veteran
14 participation at Baruch is increasing at such a rapid
15 rate that maintaining the appropriate resources for
16 our student veterans has become increasingly
17 difficult, which is negatively impacting the mental
18 and physical health of our club leadership, and
19 ultimately is becoming a hindrance on our academic
20 performance. Therefor, due to a lack support for
21 student veterans, Baruch College cannot state that it
22 is a military determinant. (sic) In the last five
23 days leading up to this hearing, the school has
24 suddenly utilized social media showing support for
25

3 student veterans, show the CUNY Chancellor honoring
4 our veterans by making cards for us. Showing a slide
5 show in honor of Veterans' Day by utilizing pictures—
6 utilizing pictures off of our Facebook pages. All
7 this just to claim that they support us. This is
8 unacceptable. We all want to succeed, but Baruch
9 needs to be a partner and more supportive. Right
10 now, this is not happening on our campus. I would
11 like to thank you for your time and I'm ready to
12 answer any questions that you may have.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, thank you for
14 your testimony, again, each of you. I'm really
15 shocked to—to be honest with you. I mean I'm a
16 student at Baruch. I go Monday and Wednesday nights
17 this semester, and my last semester. I've been there
18 for two years. I—I have a deep appreciation for the
19 wonderful education that's provided there and how
20 affordable it is, and having been a student myself,
21 although I am not a former service member, I was
22 always very impressed with the level of customer
23 service there. So, this is—this is really news to
24 me, and I think that this is something that I will
25 definitely be speaking to some of the folks at—
Baruch about especially with respect to the—the—you—

3 that Baruch is the only college in the CUNY system
4 that--that does not have a--a veterans coordinator. Is
5 that--is that, in fact, true or is there one that's
6 just in the enrollment? Is there--there isn't one
7 there?

8 MELISSA SUE: So, we do not have a
9 coordinator or a director. All we have is a
10 certifying official, but he is not fully the
11 certifying official. He was Baruch's Registrar.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, alright, so
13 that--I think that's the problem, and I--I do
14 understand the--the--the real estate is an issue for
15 everybody, the lack of facilities. In a perfect
16 world CUNY would have these fall-in campuses and
17 rooms for everybody, but I do think that if the room
18 that you're in now are you in the--the new building?
19 You're in the bus--the business school building, the
20 veterans resource room is it in the library building
21 or is in the--the new building, or--or the one on 23rd
22 Street?

23 MELISSA SUE: We're--we're in the Newman
24 Vertical Campus so the new building.

25 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So you're--you're in
the Vertical Campus?

3 MELISSA SUE: Uh-huh.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, where in the
5 Vertical—where in the Vertical Campus is your room?

6 MELISSA SUE: We're—we're on the third
7 floor. We're actually separated from Student Life. I
8 We're actually right next to the Chaplin's Office. I
9 don't know if you noticed?

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I don't know where
11 the Chaplain's Office is. [laughter] I probably
12 should.

13 MELISSA SUE: It's on the way to--

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] I went
15 to seminary school, too, and at one point in my life,
16 but anyway. So, you have a—a tiny room that fits ten
17 people on the third floor. So that's an issue. You
18 don't have a veteran's coordinator. That's an issue.
19 Have you met with Dean Birdsell or—or—the
20 President, you've—the President, you as being—the
21 President of the Veterans Student Club there?

22 MELISSA SUE: So I've actually met with
23 Dean Art King. He's also our VP of Student Affairs.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

25 MELISSA SUE: Last year we used to have a
monthly veterans task force meeting, which consisted

3 of our certified official and myself, and I think our
4 past president, Machete. We discussed the
5 coordinator last year but because the task force came
6 about so late in the semester, it was dismissed until
7 this year. To date, I've only had one meeting with
8 him this semester.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay.

10 MELISSA SUE: The President of the
11 College, President Wallerstein has not noticed us at
12 this time.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, I-I would
14 encourage him to do so, and I might put that in
15 writing at some point. I think it was important not
16 on-not for symbolic, but this is-but just for the
17 maintaining mutual respect the lines of communication
18 open that. The president of CUNY Colleges, the
19 President-the respective Presidents and also the
20 Chancellor maybe it's an annual meeting, once-once a
21 year with all the club presidents and around veterans
22 then. Maybe it's a breakfast. Maybe it's an
23 informal thing. Maybe it's more formal. I don't
24 know, but I-I think that that-that would really go a
25 long way, but the-the-the lack of services that are
being provided for veterans at Baruch is very

1
2 disturbing for me because I'm a student there, but
3 I'm also the Chair of the Veterans Committee, and
4 it's kind of embarrassing that the Chair of the
5 Veterans Committee is also a graduate student at
6 Baruch, but there is no—they're not hearing these
7 types of experiences that you're having and again I
8 am not veteran myself. My brother is currently a
9 Marine. He's in Camp Pendleton. He graduated MCRD
10 last year, but I and—and all of my colleagues have a
11 deep respect and admiration for the sacrifices that
12 veterans have made on our behalf, and we decided to
13 have this hearing today to discuss how CUNY is
14 serving veterans well, and the maybe what some of the
15 areas that we can improve upon. And so, I think
16 that's why you test—everybody is testified—every
17 student who came in testified today. It's meaningful
18 and it's important because we're starting a
19 conversation that hopefully will lead to changes in
20 policy or facilities or hiring practices because we
21 can always do better. So that's my spiel, but does
22 my Co-chair have any [off mic] similar questions or
23 comments?

24 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, just a few
25 questions. How long has there been a vacancy in the

3 position of Coordinator or Director? How long has
4 the position been vacant?

5 MELISSA SUE: Well, there was never
6 actually been any tracking of veterans at Baruch
7 college to include the—the personnel that would
8 assist us.

9 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: There's never been
10 a person?

11 MELISSA SUE: As far as we know the—the
12 longest standing veteran supporter at Baruch on staff
13 is our certifying official, and as long as he's been
14 there for the last 6 to 6-1/2 years, there's never
15 been a position open for it.

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Has it been
17 advertised to your knowledge that this position
18 exists and that it should be—that they're requesting
19 people to submit applications? Do you know if that's
20 happened?

21 MELISSA SUE: So at this time, they're
22 not accepting applications. It's not a position that
23 is widely advertised. It's not something that the
24 college is open to because according to the college,
25 there is not the—there is no longer a budget to hire
persons for that purpose.

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And how long has it
4 been that you have not been able to get a response to
5 your request to meet with the President or his
6 representative?

7 MELISSA SUE: For us—for us it's been
8 this semester. We're much more active outside of the
9 club this semester. So it's been approximately three
10 months.

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And in terms of you
12 said that there was some posters put out or something
13 within the last couple of weeks or the last couple of
14 days to address—to highlight the great relationship
15 or the fact that they appreciated veterans. Is that
16 the first time that that kind of publicity has been
17 given to veterans?

18 MELISSA SUE: Yes. So the college has
19 never actually advertised the military funding or
20 that we had a student veteran population on campus
21 whether that be for Veterans Day or Memorial Day.
22 Last year we did have an issue on Veteran's Day. The
23 school did have blank posters that students could
24 find and there were inappropriate messages written on
25 it. So we did--

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] It has
4 what? Say that again.

5 MELISSA SUE: In- inappropriate messages
6 written on there to our veterans. I'm not-I don't
7 want to say, but the-this year we asked for that not
8 to happen, but we did try something new this year
9 where we-we tried a Veterans Week program rather than
10 Veterans' Day. Student Life, the Office of the Dean,
11 Vice President. No one came. No one helped to
12 advertise. No one helped to set up the event, but on
13 Friday for Veteran's Day they all posted on social
14 media that they were at the event watching, that they
15 enjoyed the events, that they supported student
16 veterans. We also work very closely with another
17 group on campus to create a video that created a
18 spotlight on the positive attributes of having
19 student veterans on campus. We were told that we
20 couldn't advertise it on campus. We received the
21 specifications on Thursday during Veterans' luncheon,
22 and we weren't able to meet their criteria in order
23 to have that done. So the school utilized pictures
24 and videos from our personal Facebook pages and
25 posted that video as their own.

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Did you know that
4 there was a veterans program at Baruch before you
5 want, and did—if you had that knowledge, how did that
6 impact your decision to go to Baruch? How did you
7 come to go to Baruch? Did you know about the
8 veterans' programs before you went or did you find
9 out while you were there?

10 MELISSA SUE: So I think myself like many
11 of the other Baruch students here we chose Baruch
12 based off the name and the programs that they
13 offered. Nothing to do with the actual veterans'
14 programming.

15 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So no outreach? You
16 hadn't received any outreach through any of the
17 veterans' organizations or anything that would alert
18 you to the fact that they had the opportunity for you
19 to go with no car, and that there would be a
20 director. You didn't have any of that information?

21 MELISSA SUE: No. I—I was never notified
22 about that.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Did any of the
24 others, any of the others, the panels know about it
25 before?

3 TRENT COYLE: As well we were informed of
4 that particularly prior to enrollment or joining the
5 school. Again, we're-being a business school that
6 was largely the reason why I was attending. There
7 was-there was some small information available on the
8 website about who to contact as far as enrollment,
9 but as far as outreach, there wasn't actually or
10 outreach or anything of that nature. None of that
11 occurred.

12 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And to the graduates
13 from La Guardia, did you know that they had a special
14 veterans' program before you-before you want to La
15 Guardia?

16 LOREN PATTERSON: I learned about the-
17 that program through a VA representative. So it was a
18 personal connection.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

20 LOREN PATTERSON: It was just in
21 communication with a counselor that when I was trying
22 to go some when I back to here.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, sir. Thank
24 you very much, Mr. Chair.

25 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Madam
Chair, and thank you again for testifying today. If

3 you could stick around after the hearing I'd be happy
4 to exchange business cards with you after. We're on
5 our last panel. So we should be done in about 15
6 minutes, maybe 20. Thank you.

7 MELISSA SUE: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The last panel
9 consists of the following individuals: Jonathan
10 Fermin-Robbins from Hunter College; Sean Sterrett;
11 Kevin Chemilio from Lehman College and Juan M.
12 Cologne from Queens College. [pause] [background
13 comments]

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. We'll
15 ask that you get started. I'll start on my far left
16 if you'll give us your name and your testimony.
17 Thank you.

18 JONATHAN FERMIN-ROBBINS: Thank you.
19 Good afternoon, Chairpersons Barron and Ulrich, and
20 members of the committee and honored guests. On
21 behalf of the 200 plus student veterans at Hunter
22 College I thank you very much for your continued
23 commitment and support, and for the opportunity to
24 testify before you today. Before I proceed with the
25 rest of my testimony, I want to emphasize the
following points.

3 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Would
4 you give us your name, please for the record?

5 JONATHAN FERMIN-ROBBINS: Sure, my-my
6 name is Jonathan Fermin-Robbins. Veteran services
7 are greatly appreciated and are not taken for
8 granted. Hunter College sets the standard for
9 veteran friendly application, registration and
10 academic support. The approved program is world
11 class, and is a concept that should be widely
12 adopted. Improvements are not only possible but the
13 answers already exist within the CUNY system. I
14 recommend the following considerations:

15 Examine how different schools excel at
16 their respective veteran services programs.

17 Develop a standardization version-develop
18 a standardized version of these services throughout
19 all CUNY schools.

20 Increase support of approved services,
21 enabling effective coupling for the veterans resource
22 centers and coordinator.

23 Provide adequate funding to make the
24 above possible. I served six years in the United
25 States Army. I spent the majority of my enlistment
overseas, and served and additional five years as a

1 Senior Government GS employee working for the
2 Department of Defense. I started attending Hunter
3 College in the spring of 2015. The CUNY Central
4 Office Veterans representative made my application
5 process smooth and straightforward. This seamless
6 transition continued throughout the registration
7 process as a direct result of having an academic
8 advisor who was also the head of the Student Veteran
9 Services at Hunter College. My personal experienced
10 transitioning to Hunter serves as a shining example
11 of the great lengths the City and CUNY goes and
12 continues to go to in an effort to support veterans.
13 After having attended Hunter College for one year, I
14 was asked to serve as President of the Hunter College
15 Student Veterans Club. It is the goal of my
16 testimony today to bring to your attention three
17 Hunter College student veterans' experiences, submit
18 for your consideration my thoughts and the progress
19 made thus far, and to proposed a way forward.

21 I'll begin with Ashley's experience.

22 Ashley Robinson served seven years in the United
23 States Air Force, separated in May and started
24 attending Hunter College in the fall of 2016. The
25 difficulties she faced were not with admissions or

1 registering for classes. Hunter has successfully
2 made this a fairly easy and intuitive process.
3 Ashley's greatest challenge was finding an affordable
4 place to live within a reasonable proximity to Hunter
5 College. Though there were numerous veteran services
6 available to Ashley, she was unable to access them.
7 Ashley's lack of access to these services is a direct
8 result of what many veteran students experience upon
9 their reentry into civilian life, information
10 overload. Having overcome the difficulty with
11 finding affordable housing, Ashley continues to face
12 challenges with making numerous VA clinic
13 appointments, ensuring her VA disability claims
14 processing, and keeping her focus on her studies. In
15 Ashley's words, I just wish there was a way to bridge
16 the gap between the numerous veteran services
17 available and the veteran who is totally consumed
18 with academic studies, commuting, VA appointments and
19 all the required paperwork. I feel that there is no
20 central point of contact on the direct ties to the VA
21 clinics to answer these questions and to be a
22 champion on behalf of veteran students. Ashley also
23 points out that there seems to be no standard among
24 CUNY schools on how veteran services are implemented.
25

1 She asked me: Is there a benchmark for standard
2 bearer among CUNY schools? If so, where? And are
3 the schools meeting this benchmark?
4

5 Patrick served in the United States Air
6 Force for eight years before applying to Hunter in
7 the fall of 2013. Like many other student veterans,
8 he was drawn to Hunter because of its high academic
9 standing and reputation as a top notch school.

10 Patrick's experience applying to Hunter was also
11 seamless and this positive experience continued
12 through to the registration process. The transfer of
13 his wealth of experience and formal education in the
14 Air Force, however, did not have the same seamless
15 transition. Of the 92 credits earned in the United
16 States Air Force, Hunter College only accepted 11 of
17 these, and averaged his incoming GPA to 2.6 as the
18 Air Force was not assessing a grade for credits
19 earned. Patrick says there quite a few other veterans
20 who avoid Hunter because of their policy regarding
21 credits through military experience and training.

22 Patrick also points out that while PROVE interns are
23 an invaluable resource in terms of their
24 psychological and social benefit, their ability to
25 provide sound advice in regards to VA regulations and

1 services is severely limited due to their short time
2 on campus, two semesters. And unfortunately,
3 experience for Patrick resulted in the loss of
4 thousands of dollars he could have potentially been
5 afforded had he been given the proper information.
6 Patrick also points out that for the first year and a
7 half at Hunter he was not college mode. I was just
8 trying to stay above the water and couldn't use all
9 of the services offered to my full advantage. I felt
10 like I had to do all the paperwork myself, and was
11 just trying to figure everything out. There was no
12 local support to help me navigate the VA.
13

14 Megan served in the United States Air
15 Force for 10 years and was medically retired in 2013.
16 Megan says this is my first year at Hunter College.
17 While getting here was not without its challenges,
18 the majority of my administrative issues were
19 resolved fairly quickly by college staff once the
20 issues were raised. I feel that if an issue came up,
21 I could go to Marty, the VA Certifying official and
22 academic advisor to get it fixed. House hunting
23 wasn't much of a problem. I'm from New York
24 originally and I stayed with family while I was
25 apartment hunting. There were financial

1 difficulties, mainly I did not meet the salary
2 requirements for budgeting owner's one (sic) as I am
3 unemployed. I was able to have my family by way of
4 loan. (sic) Some of the greater challenges I faced
5 moving back have been about travel to my appointments
6 and the availability of appointments. A member of
7 the Special Fee Clinics are only available once a
8 week and often in the early morning. I'm often faced
9 with the choice of having to be late for class, leave
10 early or skip class altogether to make appointments
11 on time. I've also waited more than an hour to see
12 some doctors forcing me to skip class to keep the
13 appointment. As for VA bureaucracy, there have been
14 some issues. I think learning about programs for the
15 New York Harbor VA Hospital-Hospital could be vital,
16 but it seems I have no representation at our school.
17 Additionally, there was no information from the VA
18 about receiving the disabled rate on MTA and monthly
19 passes. I talked to several VA offices, and when I
20 first heard about it and they bounced around to
21 various other offices only to be told that no one
22 actually knows how the system works. I am currently
23 paying more than \$110 on transportation every month.
24

1
2 The way forward. The experiences of
3 actually Patrick and Megan clearly demonstrate the
4 areas of the Veterans services that are extremely
5 successful while also eliminating others that are
6 ripe for improvement. Ashley brought up a question
7 that I believe holds the key because the next day the
8 Veterans Services within CUNY and the city as a
9 whole. Her question was: Is there a benchmark or
10 standard among the CUNY schools—excuse me—CUNY
11 schools? If so, where? And are all the schools
12 meeting this benchmark. As Hunter College student, I
13 cannot provide an authoritative answer to this
14 question given my limited perspective. However, I
15 travel to other colleges, and observe other veteran
16 resource centers, and can confidently say that there
17 are benchmarks already in existence with the CUNY
18 system. For example, Hunter College set the
19 benchmark for admissions, registration and aca-
20 academic assistance. BMCC is the leader when it
21 comes to the Veterans Resource Center and its ability
22 to facilitate veteran services and render assistance.
23 From my perspective, and from the questions I posed
24 to school officials, the discrepancy between the
25 various CUNY schools come down to monetary resources.

1 All CUNY schools would be able to achieve a unified
2 level of success in all areas from admission,
3 registration and academics for Veterans Resource
4 Center services, which allocated the proper funding.
5 Hunter establishes superior admissions, registration
6 and academic advising processes for veterans because
7 that is—that is where Hunter put its limited monetary
8 resources. BMCC excels at providing unparalleled
9 Veteran Resource Center services because that is
10 where BMCC had its limited monetary resources. The
11 next day, the Veteran Services, which would clearly
12 establish New York City as the national standard
13 there is easily within reach. I respectfully submit
14 to these committees, the City Council of New York and
15 the Mayor's Office of New York City the consideration
16 of performing additional research and allocating
17 additional funding that will effect a clear and
18 readily achievable way to combine the proven concepts
19 already in existence within the CUNY system and,
20 therefore, effectively bridge the gap between the
21 plethora of services available and the student
22 veterans who need them. As an additional point, I
23 want to point out that Hunter College also does not
24 have a full time veterans resource coordinator, and
25

3 I'm also ready to answer any questions that you may
4 have. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. Next
6 panelist. [pause]

7 SEAN STERRETT: Good afternoon, Chairman
8 Ulrich, Chairperson Barron, members of the Veterans
9 and Higher Education Committee. My name is Sean
10 Sterrett and I am currently at La Guardia Community
11 College student. I served in the United States
12 Marine Corps from 2006 to 2011. I deployed in
13 support of Operation Iraqi State into Al Anbar
14 Province in 2009, and—and received most dec—most of
15 the decorations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom
16 and Operation Services. However, upon coming home—
17 upon coming home, I was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic
18 Stress Disorder, and other service connected injuries
19 of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. As I
20 started treatment, I enrolled at La Guardia Community
21 College in March of 2014. I want to tell you that
22 since Steven Clark and Darrell Griffin have arrived
23 at La Guardia, I have been the victim of harassment
24 and a hostile environment at La Guardia's veterans
25 enlisting. (sic) I have had Mr. Clark, who is the
Vice Chair of Veterans Services for Student Affairs,

3 verbally assault me, and then turn around and
4 immediately call the campus police to have me removed
5 from the campus. I have also been kicked out of the
6 Veterans Resource Center, a proposed safe space,
7 while being intimidated with no provocation. I have
8 been—let's see [pause]. There have been many
9 altercations between myself, Mr. Clark and Mr.
10 Griffin, and the two items I stated were issues that
11 were brought to the attention of the administration
12 at La Guardia Community College, and nothing was done
13 to address it. Mr. Clark used the Senior Academic
14 Advisor Mr. Griffin to misinform and mislead veterans
15 to the point where I have had to request that he not
16 handle my academic advisory sessions due to the fact
17 he could not prove that he was competent in the
18 position that Mr. Clark hired him for. While I was
19 hospitalized for PTSD related issues, it was Mr.
20 Clark who harassed my brother to pass information to
21 me that I needed to hurry up and leave the hospital
22 in his words. This type of harassment was not
23 beneficial to my recovery. It was counterproductive
24 to all I have worked for in my transition back into
25 society. My experience as La Guardia Community
College has been prejudicial to my mental welfare,

3 which originally led to my hospitalization. In the
4 past three semesters, Mr. Clark has made my college
5 experience into a very negative one. Recently, my
6 fellow veterans and I submitted a package of all our
7 correspondence along with my statement to CUNY's
8 Central Office after these atrocious acts were
9 ignored by La Guardia's President Gail Mellow, Vice
10 President of Student Affairs Michael Baston, and the
11 additional administrators. This came after many
12 attempts to mediate the issues, which Mr. Clark had
13 utilized to harass and intimidate us. We met with
14 Interim Vice Chancellor Chris Rosa, but there was no
15 resolution. Vice Chancellor Chris Rosa's solution
16 was to push the issue back to La Guardia now saying
17 that the President is open to us. Where was she
18 when—for the three semesters while I was—while I
19 continued to be harassed? On Veterans Day I was
20 blocked from the La Guardia Twitter account. CUNY
21 says its veteran friendly, but if this is how I've
22 been treated, then I wonder how—about other veterans,
23 and what they might be going through. I am angry at
24 CUNY for allowing this to go on for so long. This
25 has to stop, and it needs to be addressed. I'm
asking both committees to hold another hearing to

1
2 follow up on what actions CUNY and La Guardia has
3 taken to address Mr. Clark and Mr. Griffin, and I
4 would ask that the Council pull any funding going to
5 CUNY for veterans until they resolve these issues. I
6 thank you all for your time, and I'm ready to answer
7 any questions you may have. Thank you very much.

8 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. Next
9 panelist please.

10 KEVIN CHEMILIO: Good afternoon, Chairman
11 Ulrich, Chairwoman Barron and members of the Veterans
12 and Higher Education Committee. My name is Kevin
13 Chemilio, and I'm grateful to have the opportunity to
14 address all of you about my CUNY experiences. So, a
15 little bit about me. I served in the Marine Corps
16 from July 2007 to July 2014, and when I got out
17 instead of going to school, I decided I wanted to
18 work on an oil rig drilling for natural gas and oil,
19 probably one of the hardest things I've ever done in
20 my entire life not just because of the physical labor
21 but in parts of the actual color of my skin made that
22 a very difficult job. However, I realized that if I
23 really wanted to get ahead and do better in life for
24 myself and my family that I needed to go to school.
25 So I moved back to New York City, and I attended La

1 Guardia Community College from March 2014 to June
2 2016. During my time at La Guardia I became the
3 Veterans Club President who has served for three
4 semesters where now I am actually the President of
5 the Veterans Association in Lehman College, and also
6 we have an SVA chapter there as well. We just got
7 that going. So during my time in La Guardia, Mr.—Mr.
8 Clark became the Director of Veterans Services for
9 Student Affairs. I personally had high hopes that he
10 would make La Guardia a little bit better than it was
11 before. Unfortunately, that was not the cause.
12 During my time at La Guardia, I witnessed Mr. Clark
13 lie, double talk, harass myself and other veterans
14 while Mr. Griffin spied on us and followed us all
15 over campus and then reported back to Mr. Clark
16 anything that we did instead. Mr. Clark's harassment
17 towards me started immediately. A number of us were
18 supposed to have an new issues (sic) meeting with
19 Vice President Baston, and as per his open door
20 policy. Mr. Clark expressed his discontent and also
21 said that if he was not going to be present for this
22 meeting, that we would not be holding that meeting.
23 Then Mr. Clark decided to create Battle Buddy Center,
24 and when we asked for the MOU, he refused and we once
25

1
2 again had to meet with Vice President Baston, who
3 then willingly gave us a copy of the MOU with no
4 problem. [pause] Mr. Baston then promised that he
5 would meet again—again with us the following semester
6 to make sure that things were getting better with
7 myself and a former member of the cabinets Ricky
8 Malone, Sean Sterrett and Noah—Noah Almanor and a
9 couple others. The following semester, Mr. Clark
10 became even more emboldened. When the other student
11 veterans and I saw what he and Mr. Griffin were
12 doing, we once again asked for a meeting with Vice
13 President Baston. It was then that Vice President
14 Baston revoked—revoked his open door policy, refused
15 to meet with us and told us to go back to Mr. Clark,
16 the same person who—who we had these initial issues
17 with. In our 42-page correspondence packet to La
18 Guardia's administration, which I'm sure you all
19 have, detailing the harassment and injustices, you
20 will notice that Vice President Baston only responds
21 to one of my emails after we asked for Mr. Clark to
22 be removed from the vet—from the Veterans Office.
23 Instead of being the Vice President and leader he
24 should have been—instead of being the Vice President
25 and the leader he should have been, he chose to

1 belittle, intimidate and berate me with false
2 narratives about my intention of exposing the
3 grievances of the student veterans that were being
4 harassed such as Sean, Noah and several others.
5 Incredibly, Mr. Rosa's answer was to push it back La
6 Guardia, the very same situation that we just came
7 from. This is a travesty and it's unacceptable.
8 President Mellow and Vice President Baston could have
9 avoided this whole entire thing by just working to
10 address the issue. I'm angry and disappointed at
11 CUNY and La Guardia for treating us the way that they
12 did for as long as they did. We veterans share a
13 bond, and that's something to go back to what Mr.
14 Patterson was saying, it's not just the place that we
15 go to for any other resources. It's the place that
16 we go to decompress. So when you take people,
17 individuals that were in a high stress situation, and
18 put them in another high stress situation, that's a
19 recipe for disaster. The Veterans Resource Center at
20 La Guardia used to be a place where all of us can go
21 to unwind. Even if we didn't want to go home, we had
22 a place where we could relax and know there was safe
23 space. As many other veterans in this—in this
24 hearing have said, that place has completely changed.
25

1 That was a place I could go to and many others here
2 that standing next to me, and also that are sitting
3 over there could attest to. CUNY says that it's
4 veteran friendly, but if this is how they treat us,
5 and they say that they're—they're veteran friendly, I
6 wonder how many other of these student veterans,
7 which we can actually see in other colleges have
8 these same issues. Despite all the obstacles, the
9 harassment, the lack of support from Mr. Clark and
10 Mr. Griffin, and La Guardia's senior administration,
11 I graduated from La Guardia, and I'm currently
12 attending Lehman College pursuing a bachelor's in
13 psychology. Lehman has great services as well. It's
14 a great place. The only problem is the broom closet
15 that we have for a lounge. There's no space there.
16 So there has to be some sort of dialogue with the
17 campus planning its facilities in order to have a
18 designated specific area for vets because it's too
19 small for the amount of number of student vets that
20 are enrolled. In closing, the student veterans at La
21 Guardia Community College have corresponded with
22 emails that go back a whole calendar year. La
23 Guardia Community College's administration did not
24 make it a priority until they were made aware of this
25

1 hearing. Mr. Clark violated policies with CUNY again
2 and again, and yet no one at La Guardia has done
3 anything to rectify it. We're still continuing today
4 with Sean--with Sean being here. This must change.
5 Every CUNY institution must take complaints from its
6 veterans seriously, and address them in a timely
7 manner. I'm also asking both committee to hold
8 another hearing next semester to follow up on what
9 actions CUNY and La Guardia have taken to address
10 these issues. So, I just want to thank you guys for
11 your time, and I'm ready to answer any questions that
12 you may have.
13

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you, and we'll
15 hear from our final panelist. [pause]

16 JUAN COLOGNE: Good afternoon, good
17 afternoon. My name is Juan Cologne and I just wanted
18 to say good to see you, Council Member Ulrich. You
19 were at our--our ribbon cutting ceremony at the
20 college. It's good to see you again, and
21 Councilwoman Barron, it's good to see you again. Not
22 only are you representing my district as the East New
23 York, I met you at Lobby Day in Albany to get that
24 office a law update, and to see you, and I'm happy to
25 have the privilege with you two, and represent the

3 committees here on our behalf. I'm glad I was able
4 to listen to other vets from other colleges within
5 CUNY before testifying because the model in my school
6 can be applied elsewhere. My experience at Queens
7 College has been great so far. The Veterans Office
8 has an Outreach Specialist, the Certifying Official
9 and the dedicated advisor in the same state, and the
10 staff is going above and beyond for us. Even though
11 we have issues that are similar to other CUNY
12 colleges—other CUNY schools, I am deeply concerned
13 with what's been happening at La Guardia. Just to
14 backtrack a little bit, I am a Marine Reservist. I
15 served between 2007 and '06, and I served in Iraq in
16 2003, and I had a few attempts at different work. I
17 went back to school at La Guardia in 2014. I am an
18 example of how necessary community colleges are to
19 prepare students if they're not quite ready for
20 senior colleges. This report I received from Vicky
21 Enzodello (sp?) David Danza at the Veterans Group
22 Resource Center. It was crucial for getting my mind
23 focused on the education task I put myself back on.
24 It wasn't until I started doing work study and
25 holding various positions in the Veterans Club when I
realized how dysfunctional the relationship between

1
2 CUNY and the leadership at La Guardia in regards to
3 the needs of the student veterans. I did what I
4 could with the rest of the club to make our
5 experience at the school not only better for us, but
6 more importantly for the veterans that come after us.
7 After the fall—at the fall of last year, I
8 transferred to Queens College happy for the next
9 chapter of my educational pursuits. I was sad about
10 what we couldn't improve at La Guardia. The
11 atmosphere and services provided by these two
12 colleges are so opposite in so many ways, and that
13 shouldn't be the case if they both fall under the
14 same system. My fear is that the current and future
15 veterans—veteran students might get so discouraged by
16 the lack of support that they need that they might
17 drop out or not go back to school in the first place,
18 and I hope CUNY will take a long overdue action to
19 tickle your thoughts again. Thank you all for your
20 time, and I will also answer any questions that you
21 may have. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I want to thank this
23 panel for coming and taking the time to bring to our
24 attention some of the shortcomings and some of the
25 problems that we're facing in terms of what CUNY's

3 interaction has been, and their commitment to
4 addressing the needs of veterans. It appears that
5 it's again at particular campuses that these problems
6 exist. It seems that some have exemplary programs, as
7 we have heard from other panelists, but it is quite
8 disturbing to know that it appears that there's at
9 least one campus where it's a longstanding problem
10 that has not been addressed and corrected. So that's
11 why it is disturbing to know, and we will, in fact,
12 make sure that we get in touch with CUNY and see what
13 is going on, and make sure that there is some redress
14 to the grievances, some resolution to the problems
15 because certainly we want to make sure that we have
16 an environment that everybody feels respected, and
17 has an opportunity to have resolution to what their
18 differences are. I want to thank you for your
19 testimony, and I'll turn it to my co-chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes, and I-I will
21 echo the sentiments of my co-chair and my colleague
22 Council Member Barron and thanking you first for
23 being here today to testify to share your experiences
24 and your stories with us and also again to thank you
25 for your service to our country, and to let you know
how important your voice, your opinions, your

1 participation in today's hearing is, and was, and
2 that this is just part of a larger conversation that
3 we are helping to facilitate to improve the way CUNY
4 serves the veteran student—student veteran
5 population. So, your testimony is a matter of public
6 record. In several days you'll be able to go online
7 and look on the Council website and actually see it
8 in print. So, I think that that is very important
9 for you that you weren't just talking to a bunch of
10 elected officials, but that your opinions and your
11 experiences and the—the things that you actually
12 stated today are—are matter of public record, and—and
13 will be able to be referenced to at a later time as
14 well as the comments that elected officials make, who
15 serves on both of the committees. So, I don't have
16 any questions of you. I think a lot of the questions
17 and points have already been made, and I don't want
18 to reiterate them because we actually have to clear
19 the Chamber for an event celebrating Diwali. In
20 fact, it was supposed start 15 minutes ago. So our—
21 our Hindu friends and folks can observe that holiday.
22 So again, I want to thank you, thank the fellow
23 students, thank the CUNY representatives who were
24
25

3 here today, and that's concludes today's hearing.

4 [gavel]

5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

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 December 6, 2016