

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON
HIGHER EDUCATION

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December 13, 2018
Start: 10:11 a.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.
14th Fl.

B E F O R E: CHAIM M. DEUTSCH
Chairperson

INEZ D. BARRON
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Justin L. Brannan
Mathieu Eugene
Alan N. Maisel
Paul L. Vallone
Laurie A. Cumbo
Robert F. Holden
Ben Kallos
Ydanis A. Rodriguez

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

Loree Sutton, Commissioner, NYC Department of Veterans Services

Cassandra Alvarez, Senior Advisor & Director of Public-Private Partnerships, NYC Department of Veterans Services

Christopher Rose, Interim Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs, CUNY

Lisa Beatha, University Director of Veteran Affairs, City University of New York, CUNY

Leora Shudofsky, Director for PROVE, Project for Return and Opportunity in Veterans Education City University of New York, CUNY

Joseph Berkman Breen, Legal Fellow, Special Litigation Unit, New York Legal Assistance Group, NYLAG

Peter Awn, Professor of Islamic Religion and Comparative Religion, Columbia University & Chair of Advisory Board of Columbia Center for Veteran Transition and Integration

Angel Vasquez, Student & Office of Veteran Affairs, Lehman College

Hannah Sinoway, Chief Services Officer, IABA's Rapid Response Referral Program, RRRP

Samuel Molik, Director of Policy and Legislative Advocacy, New York City Veterans Alliance

Coco Culhane, Founder and Director, Veteran Advocacy
Project

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[sound check] [background comments/pause]

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, we're

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going to do a do over. [gavel] Good morning,

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everyone.

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COUNCIL MEMBERS: [in unison] Good

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morning.

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CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Good morning. Good

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afternoon. My name is Chaim Deutsch. I'm the Chair

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of the Veteran's Committee. I would like to thank

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you all for being here today for our joint oversight

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hearing with the Committees on Higher Education and

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Veterans and access to higher education. I would

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like to thank Chair Barron for co-chairing this

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hearing today, and I would like to extend my warmest

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regards to the veterans who have joined us this

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morning. I really want to say that—to thank everyone

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for being here for taking of your time, and joining u

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at every single veterans hearing, and it's—it's

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really important for the city, for our veterans and

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so, I want to thank you for your service. For

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decades, educational benefits following the

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completion of military service has been a major

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incentive for those to serve. The GI Bill, which

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provides stipends and living expenses for veterans

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2 attending college or trade schools allowing 7.8
3 million to 60 million returning World War II veterans
4 to participate in education and training or training
5 program. The GI Bill has been subsequently revised
6 and expanded in 1952, 1966, 1984, 2008 and 2017 with
7 enactment of post 9/11 GI Bill and the Forever GI
8 Bill. This legislation enhances the educational
9 benefits for individuals who served on active duty in
10 armed forces on or September 11th of 2001.
11 Qualifying service members can receive as much as
12 100% of tuition equivalent to the cost of the most
13 expensive public school in the state as well as 15 of
14 eligibility for benefits and housing stipends.
15 Unfortunately, our student veterans face and continue
16 to face challenges in the federal government in
17 receiving these benefits on time. GI Bill payments
18 are frequently delayed and as a result, student
19 veterans are left to find their own tuition and
20 housing even when they are not able. Many of these
21 veterans face enormous financial strain and even
22 eviction and potential homelessness with the GI Bill
23 does not get paid on time. It is our duty to make
24 sure that our veterans are taken care of in New York City
25 even when they are not receiving proper help from the

1
2 federal government on time. Furthermore, there are
3 more 3,200 veterans who are currently enrolled at the
4 25 CUNY campuses spanning every branch of the armed
5 forces and every academic concentration. Our primary
6 objective today is to ensure that those individuals
7 are receiving customized individualized advising that
8 meets their unique school set and life experience and
9 they are supported throughout their education that
10 the CUNY's coordination with partners and not-for-
11 profits in private sectors is as smooth as possible.
12 Finally, we'll also be hearing a piece of
13 legislation, Intro 1047 sponsored by our public
14 advocates who unfortunately could not be here today.
15 This bill would require the Department of Veterans
16 Services to provide outreach and education to
17 veterans about issues related to higher education
18 including how to minimize student debts, student loan
19 repayment options and lower cost alternatives -to for
20 profit hire higher education. A rigorous education
21 is the foundation stone of a long and rewarded
22 career. Since our nation's beginning, Americans have
23 supported returning service members in their efforts
24 to-re-to-to bring them into civilian life and expand
25 their careers in new and exciting directions. It is

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2 my hope that today's legislation reinforces this—this
3 transition—tradition. I would like to thank our
4 committee staff, Counsel Nuzhat Sadri; Policy Analyst
5 Michael Kurt; Finance Analyst Zachary Harris; and my
6 Legislative Director, of course, who's just got
7 married and like five weeks ago Tova Chasanoff for
8 their work in making this hearing possible. Finally,
9 I would like to recognize my—the committee members
10 who have joined us today, Council Member Bob Holden,
11 Council Member Alan Maisel, and Council Member Ben
12 Kallos. So, thank you joining. I just want to—
13 before I give this over to my Co-Chair, I just want
14 to announce that we recently—we recently had a round
15 table with all the funded not-for-profits who
16 received from the \$2.3 million City Council
17 Initiatives, and it was really a—really a dialogue
18 during that round table. It was really open and
19 productive where every—all the not-for-profits really
20 got to know each other. So, this way when a veteran
21 approaches one not-for-profits who doesn't do the
22 services that that veteran came in for, then they
23 could just refer them to the other ones—to the other
24 not-for-profits who does that. So, everyone really
25 got to meet each other. Here in the City Council we

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2 also put together a book. It's the Veterans Resource
3 Guide, and this is strictly with all the not-for-
4 profits who receive funding so this way everyone is
5 held account-held accountable to provide those
6 services. We will be having another round table with
7 the not-for-profits who we will be—we will be
8 inviting advocates to those meetings so this way
9 everyone gets to know each other. In addition to
10 that, I have spoken to Commissioner Sutton. We'll-
11 we'll also be having a round table with the
12 advocates, with the staff of DVS. So this way all
13 advocates get to know each staff member with DVS
14 personally, and they will know exactly who to—who
15 reach out for-to-to reach out to in case services are
16 needed. Different staff members provide different
17 services, and we all need to get to know each other.
18 This way we could better work closely together to
19 provide these services to our veterans. So, I just
20 kind of—I'd like to turn it over before to my Co-
21 Chair Council Member Barron-Inez Barron. It's a
22 pleasure to have my first joint hearing with you, and
23 she is my neighborhood on the 18th Floor. So, we
24 know what—we share the same wall. So, we have to
25 hear what each other is talking about—what we talk

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2 about. So, I got to know her very well over the
3 last year.

4 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you, Council
5 Member Deutsch. Good morning everyone. I'm Council
6 Member Inez Barron, and I have the distinction of
7 being the Chair of the Committee on Higher Education.
8 I want to thank everyone who is here at today's
9 oversight hearing on veterans and access to higher
10 education, and especially all of the veterans who are
11 today. It is only fair that your government
12 recognizes your service and serves you in return.
13 So, thank you for attending this very important
14 hearing. The committees are looking forward to
15 hearing your testimony, and I encourage every student
16 veteran to testify. We are listening. Before I get
17 to the topic at hand, I would be remiss if I did not
18 first express my disappointment in the op-ed
19 published in the Daily News last month in which
20 interim Chancellor Vita Rabinowitz and Board of
21 Trustees Chair Bill Thompson called CUNY a lead
22 partner in Amazon's expansion in Long Island City,
23 steps from La Guardia Community College and not much
24 further from CUNY's Law School. As many of you are
25 aware, Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio

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2 collaborated behind closed doors to allow Amazon to
3 bypass local land use review by the City Council and
4 establish a so-called HQ2. As part of the sweetheart
5 deal, Amazon, which is the world's richest company
6 valued at \$1 trillion with a T is being provided with
7 \$3 billion with a B in incentives. This is
8 offensive. It is offensive to Long-to La Guardia
9 Community College and CUNY students who struggle to
10 pay tuition fees, basic living expenses such as
11 housing, food and metro card in order to earn a
12 degree at a university that is in a dangerous state
13 of decay and disrepair. It is offensive to CUNY
14 faculty and students many of whom are not earning a
15 living wage. It is offense to New Yorkers. How can
16 CUNY's administration promise to "commit considerable
17 college assets to ensure that Amazon has a strong
18 pipeline for talent, ideas and innovation when
19 billions in state dollars are just handed over to a
20 company where the university is being starved of
21 funds? Indeed, it was only two years ago when the
22 governor threatened to reduce state funding to CUNY
23 by 30% by shifting \$485 million of senior college
24 operating expenses and debt service costs to the
25 city. I'm forced to ask where are the incentives for

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2 our students? Who's looking out for them? There are
3 some and I'm one of those, and I can on and report
4 about this issue, but it's a transition to discuss
5 veteran students at CUNY and not also CUNY schools
6 and discuss the challenges they face with access to
7 higher education. We recognize the intrinsic value
8 of higher education from skill development to career
9 opportunities and lifetime earnings. A post-secondary
10 degree is essential to surviving and thriving in our
11 current economy. A CUNY degree has proven to
12 increase one's social mobility, which is in line with
13 the university's mission to propel the disadvantaged
14 into the middle class. This is particularly relevant
15 for veterans who risked their lives defending the
16 American Dream, yet frequently find themselves at a
17 significant disadvantage when potential employees
18 view their military experience as non-transferrable
19 to a civilian workplace. This is the disturbing—this
20 is a disturbing fact that has been identified as a
21 contributing factor to our nation's homeless veteran
22 population. Some 11% of the adult homeless population
23 are veterans, and of this number roughly 45% are
24 African-American or Hispanic. Despite accounting for
25 roughly 10% and 3.5% of the U.S. Veteran population

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2 respectively. Many of these homeless veteran-
3 veterans reside in New York City, which is home to
4 approximate 210,000 veterans, service member and
5 their families as per DVS' website. Adding to this
6 clear discrimination, veterans of color face and
7 overall lack of appreciation for their military
8 experience and civilian workplaces, veterans also
9 experience high rates of post traumatic stress and
10 addiction. In short, veterans both need and deserve
11 our support. I want to acknowledge CUNY from the
12 outreach and support it provides to the approximately
13 3,350 student veterans and military personnel
14 currently enrolled in its programs. It has been just
15 over two years since we last joined the Committee on
16 Veterans for a hearing, on veterans in the CUNY
17 system. At that hearing we heard from a number of
18 veteran students about positive aspects of their
19 college career and learned of some disturbing
20 complaints. At this hearing, I want to have an
21 update on issues raised at our last hearing, and to
22 learn about the current work of the CUNY Task Force
23 on Veteran Affairs. I'm also interested in hearing
24 from veteran students at other schools in the city as
25 well as how those students serve their veteran

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2 student populations. In particular, I'm very
3 interested about students' experiences in the Forever
4 GI Bill, and how schools are accommodating those who
5 have been affected by the delayed and miscalculated
6 benefit payments. I want to acknowledge colleagues
7 from the Higher Education Committee, Council Member
8 Holden who has already been acknowledged, and I ant
9 to thank my Chief of Staff Joy Simmons. We want to
10 thank my CUNY liaison and Director of Legislation Ann
11 N'Digo Washington, Chloe Rivera, the Committee, the
12 Committee's Policy Analyst, Paul Senegal Counsel to
13 the Committee and Yavot Sharit (sp?) the Committee's
14 Finance Analyst. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. I'm
16 going to ask the Counsel now to swear in our panel.
17 Thank you, Commissioner for coming this morning.
18 Thank you.

19 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right
20 hand. Both of you. Yes. Do you affirm to tell the
21 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in
22 your testimony before this committee, and to respond
23 honestly to Council Member questions?

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] I do.
25 [on mic] Good morning Chair Deutsch, Chair Barron,

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2 Members of the New York City Committee on Veteran as
3 well as members of the New York Committee on Higher
4 Education. I'd like to join the Chairs in thanking
5 everyone for being here this morning. As I look
6 around the room I see old friends, new friends,
7 friends I haven't met yet, but in particular I see
8 veteran advocates, members of our veteran service
9 organizations, members of our Veteran Advisory Board,
10 members of Team DVS and in particular our-our
11 partners in education here in the city, Vice
12 Chancellor Rosa as well as members of the CUNY
13 family. I see Medgar Evers, BMCC, just to name a
14 few, Lehman College as well as I see Dean Awn over
15 there hiding behind the pillar who is really the
16 founding pioneer at Columbia's Center for Veteran
17 Transition and Integration. So, we are really joined
18 by a great gang of folks here. Thanks to everyone
19 for being here. My name Loree Sutton, and I'm
20 honored to serve as the founding Commissioner of the
21 City--New York City Department of Veterans Services.
22 I'm joined today by Cassandra Alvarez, our Senior
23 Advisor and Director Public-Private Partnerships.
24 Navigating the myriad of agencies, providers and
25 associated regulations an processes can be one of the

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2 biggest challenges for a veteran in accessing
3 services particularly veterans newly transitioning
4 out of military service. At DVS we strive to take
5 the frustrations, hassles and trial and error out of
6 navigation. We do this through community engagement,
7 targeted advocacy and compassionate service from
8 outreach in employment assistance to facilitating
9 peer mentoring and whole health services to veteran
10 homelessness reduction, DVS staff members work with
11 veterans one-on-one to help them figure out what
12 benefits they might be eligible for and how to gain
13 access to those services. I'm pleased to present
14 testimony today on how DVS uses this model to promote
15 veteran access to higher education and how our
16 processes relate to the aims of the Proposed
17 Introduction No. 1047. Our home is—our city is home
18 to over 210,000 veterans who come from all walks of
19 life, faiths, backgrounds, races, ethnicities and
20 areas of service. Of this population, in 2016 there
21 were roughly 12,000 student veterans and their
22 spouses and family members currently utilizing their
23 post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to fulfill
24 their next mission of personal and professional
25 development at New York City's colleges,

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2 universities, trade schools and job training
3 programs. When an eligible student veteran enrolls
4 in college, the Post 9/11 GI Bill pays for 36 months
5 of education at Department of Defense approved
6 institutions of higher education or on-the-job career
7 training programs. For those pursuing higher
8 education the Post 9/11 GI Bill pays the cost of
9 school tuition directly while simultaneously sending
10 a stipend earmarked for living expenses to the
11 student veteran called the Basic Allowance for
12 Housing, BAH, for as long as the student is enrolled
13 in classes. The average BAH for New York City ranges
14 from \$2,800 to \$4,100 per month, and is meant to
15 cover cost of living according to the zip code of the
16 school the veteran or family member attends.
17 Recently, with the federal government fell behind on
18 delivering the GI Bill benefits that many of our
19 student veterans rely on as their sole means to pay
20 rent, DVS and the Department of Social Services
21 stepped in to provide emergency rent arrears
22 assistance. If a student veteran has fallen behind
23 on rent and is at risk of facing eviction, they can
24 seek immediate assistance by visit the New York City
25 Department of Social Services, Michael J. Handy,

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2 Veteran Service Center located at 25 Chapel Street in
3 Brooklyn to have their case evaluate for emergency
4 rent arrears funds and other benefits. In addition,
5 DVS and DSS partner together to create and official
6 letter that student veterans can take to their
7 landlords to validate the delayed GI Bill payments a
8 legitimate cause for late rent payments. In 2017—in
9 2017, DVS and the New York City Commission on Human
10 Rights partnered on an educational campaign to
11 apprise the city's student veteran and landlord
12 communities of the GI Bill as a legitimate source of
13 income, which can be used towards housing costs. Of
14 the city's 12,000 student veterans and family members
15 using the GI Bill, approximately 3,400 attend college
16 at the City University of New York or CUNY. These
17 veterans can avail themselves of resources such as
18 educational benefits and entitlements counseling,
19 advocacy resources, mentoring and internship
20 programs, and support resources for them and their
21 families offered through the CUNY Office of Veterans
22 Affairs Led by Lisa Beatha here today as well. For
23 those student veterans who wish to speak one-on-one
24 with a peer about how to navigate campus life,
25 information about veteran campus representatives is

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2 available through COBA's page on the CUNY website or
3 by calling or emailing and contracting the CUNY
4 Central Office. In addition to COB provided
5 resources, the Project for Return and Opportunity in
6 Veterans Education or the PROVE Program offered at 10
7 of the 25 CUNY campuses, offers support systems
8 comprised of social work interns, peer student
9 veteran mentors and field instructors to promote
10 successful ease of transition into college life for
11 student veterans. Meanwhile, CUNY's Accelerated
12 Study in Associate Programs, ASAP assists students
13 earning associate degrees within three years of
14 academic study with financial, academic and personal
15 support such as career counseling, tutoring, fee and
16 tuition waivers, MTA Metro Cards and financial
17 assistance to assist with purchasing textbooks. For
18 those not attending CUNY, student veterans' specific
19 resources are also generally available at private
20 colleges and universities. For example, Columbia
21 University School of General Studies offer financial
22 aid, VA benefits counseling, information on
23 scholarships available to veterans and their family
24 members as well as a universities study program free
25 to all transitioning vets regardless of where they

1 attend school. This is performed through Columbia's
2 new Center for Veterans Transition and Military
3 Integration. Manhattan College has a Special
4 Veterans at Ease Holistic Health Retreat Program
5 designed to help student veterans manage stress and
6 successfully transition from the military to civilian
7 and academic life with other student veterans on
8 campus. In addition, Fordham University offer robust
9 programming for student veterans ranging from
10 internship placement services to on-campus student
11 veteran community building activities through the
12 Fordham Ram Vets Association. New York University
13 offers the Military Alliance Community Center for
14 undergraduate and graduate student veterans to
15 connect with other veteran and military connected
16 students as well as other student veteran clubs,
17 groups and programming in collaboration with entities
18 such as the Student Veterans of America. DVS
19 partners with the College Board whose College Level
20 Examination Program of CLEP helps student veterans
21 expedite their degree attainment through exams that
22 offer college credit based on military knowledge
23 experience and independent study. CLEP also gives
24 student veterans the ability to maximize the GI Bill
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2 allowing many to put remaining benefits towards post-
3 graduate degree studies. At DVS we created Veterans
4 On Campus, and initiative the brings together the
5 city's colleges and universities and private sector
6 organizations. The objectives of Veterans on Campus
7 are: (1) To assist academic institutions in
8 identifying and adopting best practices that create a
9 supportive student veteran experience. (2) To
10 inspire new transitioning service members and their
11 families to pursue their higher education goals here
12 in New York City. (3) To ensure successful
13 transition to not only college and community life and
14 educational achievement, but to viable new careers in
15 purpose driven civilian lives. Over the past year
16 DVS met with school leadership from a sampling of New
17 York City colleges and universities with high student
18 veteran populations. To introduce the agency as a
19 resource and to gauge best practices for promoting
20 academic success, the department issues a student
21 veteran welcome packet, which includes information on
22 transition, services mentoring, employment, financial
23 literacy and volunteering to aid student veterans
24 with opportunities to advance personally and
25 professionally. DVS also partners with the

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2 aforementioned Student Veterans of America, a leading
3 national organization that serves as the umbrella
4 over many campus based student veterans
5 organizations. Their advocacy and policy efforts led
6 to passage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill legislation, and
7 as we continue to make our Veterans on Campus
8 initiative more robust, we will work alongside SVA to
9 gain databased insights to help inform programmatic
10 next step. SVA also offers a useful self-assessment
11 tool in partnership with the college factual that
12 helps students make the right choice when selecting
13 an institution of higher learning. In January of
14 2019, the DVS will issue a Keys to Success list that
15 will encourage institutions to adopt some of the best
16 practices being implemented to support student
17 veterans and their families throughout the city. The
18 department also facilitates networking events, panel
19 discussions and career networking events for student
20 veterans and their family members looking to advance
21 their education outside of the classroom. DVS also
22 sought to gain a deeper understanding of the
23 transition experience for returning members moving to
24 New York City through a coordinated research efforts.
25 Through focus group sessions and an online survey,

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DVS reached out to and engaged with students from institutions across the city to understand motivations for moving to New York City for school, future career aspirations in addition to gauging the most common challenges experienced throughout the transition process in relation to securing housing and navigating federal, state and local benefits. The information gained from this endeavor is not an exhaustive account of the veteran student experience, but rather in an introduction to the key challenges and opportunities for further design and development. Ultimately, this information will be used to inform future Veterans on Campus programming and to leverage resources in the public and private sectors to improve service delivery for transitioning veteran students. This agency consistently looks for novel ways to coordinate and improve service delivery for our veterans and their families especially those looking to complement their military education with higher learning at one of our city's fine public or private institutions. On Veterans Day the Mayor announced that DVS has launched Vet Connect NYC, a coordinated care network with the goal of ensuring that every veteran and family member gets access to

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2 the services they have earned and need to lead
3 fulfilling and purpose driven lives. A few of the
4 many partners in the Vet Connect NYC network include
5 CUNY, Workforce One, Columbia University, Headstrong
6 Project, VA and the Vet Centers, New York University
7 the mission continues, and the Federal VA. In
8 regards to Proposed Introduction No. 1047, as
9 mentioned publicly when the bill was introduced by
10 the Public Advocate soon to be State Attorney General
11 earlier this year, we support partnering with other
12 governmental and student veteran stakeholders in
13 promoting veterans being more financially literate
14 and utilizing their GI benefits wisely. Credible
15 established providers who are knowledgeable in the
16 space of advising student veterans on how to properly
17 use their available financial resources, especially
18 towards accredited and established institutions,
19 which will help them propel to the next phase in
20 their persona and professional development. It's an
21 invaluable asset for our student veteran population.
22 The goals of financial counseling and college advice
23 and propose by Intro 1074, would not be best
24 facilitated or directed by DVS. Rather, the current
25 system DVS utilizes as I've described does accomplish

1
2 the goal of pairing veterans with entities who are
3 knowledgeable on the importance nuances of
4 financially advising student veterans. DVS currently
5 provides information to student veterans about
6 resources. For example, financial literacy such as
7 those available through the Department of Consumer
8 Affairs Financial Empowerment Network in addition to
9 its extensive resources on tips for existing student
10 loans, student debt loan clinics, agency reports such
11 as those on student loan distress in collaboration
12 with the Federal Reserve as well as information on
13 established entities such as the Federal VA and
14 students of veteran--Student Veterans of America,
15 which counsels student veterans on how to correctly
16 apply educational benefits. In addition, if at any
17 time a student veteran feels as if they have been the
18 victim of discriminatory or predatory practices by
19 any educational institution as well as landlords,
20 employers or any other potential bad actor, we urge
21 them to contact DVS so that we can connect them to
22 appropriate avenues of recourse either through city
23 resources or through our network of skilled legal
24 service providers. Veterans and their families, as
25 we've said so many times before they remain our

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2 city's leading natural renewable resource, and DVS
3 welcomes the opportunity to cultivate existing
4 partnerships and grow new relationships with
5 educational institutions who understand the
6 tremendous potential and strength of our student
7 veteran and family member population. Thank you
8 again for this opportunity to meet with you today.
9 At this time, I'm happy to address any questions you
10 may have. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you,
12 Commissioner. So, I see in here with Cassandra, I
13 just want to ask you what is your role in DVS as a
14 Senior Advisor and Director of Public and Private
15 Partnership and how do you—how do you play into
16 working with—the CUNY colleagues.

17 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Uh-hm. So, I play
18 the role of connector at DVS. As many of you know,
19 many city agencies throughout the city partner with
20 private partners to help make our efforts more robust
21 and make our reach further, and so I work with our
22 Veteran One Campus Initiative to ensure that our
23 agency has strong relationships with the schools
24 throughout New York City that have particularly high
25 student veteran populations.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, who—who in DVS
works directly with the—the schools?

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CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: So, I work directly
with the schools as far as managing the
relationships. I have great relationships with folks
in this room today, and as far as working directly
with the students, sometimes students will reach out
to me because they're familiar with my name or
they've gotten my business card at a networking
event, and our outreach team also works directly with
student veterans. Often times they will table at
campus events to ensure that those communities are
aware of DVS, the existence of our agency and the
resources we provide.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you're the ones
who works directly with-with CUNY? It's—that's your
role or do you have someone under you that--like
that?

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CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: So, I—I work directly
with the points of contact at the CUNY institutions,
and—and that's not all of them, but I have
relationships with the individuals who are the point
on Student Veterans Affairs at those institutions.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, if someone call
DVS, they would connect to you?

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CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Yep, absolutely.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And then you're the
one that does--?

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CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Yeah, and--and--and--and
based on--

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Based
on--?

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CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: --based on the
request, I'll play air traffic control and--and refer
them to another colleagues who's best positioned to
answer that question or I will--I will facilitate
directly if appropriate.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Just to provide a
little context, over the--this first year of the
Veterans on Campus program, our intent was to provide
a sampling of our higher educational institutions.
So, while we have not yet visited all of the CUNY--
CUNY institutions, as Cassandra has said, we've
visited about half of them, and we work closely with
both Vice Chancellors Rosa and Director Lisa Beatha,
for any questions that come up throughout the CUNY
system and we look forward to broadening that reach

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2 as we go forward. Also, when the VA issue came up
3 earlier this year although we had not, you know,
4 visited the over 80 institutions, we've visited about
5 20—between 20 and 25 now in our first year, we did
6 have access to the Student Veteran Coordinators at
7 each of those institutions, and then we were able as
8 a partnership with our Communications and Press
9 Secretary Alexis Wichowski and Eric Henry, we were
10 able to quickly make contact with those educational
11 institutions and determine that yes this was an issue
12 that was affecting many of our student veterans and
13 their family members, and we needed to act quickly to
14 do something that would be there in the breach to
15 help—help them—help prevent them from being evicted
16 from their apartments. Interestingly, Chair Deutsch,
17 just about that same time period. This was just after
18 Veterans' Day the College Board hosted a meeting in
19 Washington, DC and I was invited to speak there and
20 at that meeting there was a student veteran from
21 Massachusetts who cornered me in the hallway and
22 said, Ma'am, do you have any idea that that
23 memorandum, that communication has meant to student
24 veterans in New York City. He says through my social
25 network, he says I know that at 100 student veterans

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2 in New York City who were starting to pack their
3 household goods because they thought they had no
4 recourse other than to move out and stop their
5 education because they did not receive their BH
6 payments. So, I think it's a real affirmation of the
7 role that this new agency the Department of Veterans
8 Services can provide, and it's a great partnership
9 working with the committee and now committees. So,
10 nice to have you Chair Barron and your expertise with
11 higher education as well.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Okay, thank
13 you. Vet Connect NYC, does Vet Connect track all the
14 inquiries that go through Vet Connect like if
15 someone—if a veteran should go into Vet Connect,
16 inquire about certain services, does it give you that
17 information of how many inquiries and what
18 categories?

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes. So, we have
20 just, as you know, launched this new chapter of the
21 used to be NY Serves network, and now Vet Connect NYC
22 and we are now working closely to be able to mesh our
23 data collection systems with theirs, but absolutely
24 the—the beauty of this system is that we will have
25 such a greater degree of specificity and granularity

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2 about the types of services individuals are
3 requesting and then how those referrals go, what the
4 experience has actually been like.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes.

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, I look forward
7 to the new year as we continue down this road to be
8 able to update you and committee on where we re with
9 that process. It's very exciting.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great. Okay, I'm
11 looking forward to that. You mentioned in your
12 testimony that there's--there's a lot of that is given
13 out to the students who can take it to their
14 landlords.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Right? So, does--
17 what does that letter do? So, you give that letter
18 to the veteran.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes
20 so this--

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] What
22 difference does that letter make to--

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, this came out
24 of our experience really going back as far as three
25 or even four years ago, student veterans and our

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2 student veteran coordinators and, you know, our
3 institutional partners and—and academic leaders were
4 telling us that this was what their student veterans
5 users of the GI Bill, which, of course includes
6 spouses and family members, but they were coming up
7 against this, and so we then, you know we looked into
8 the issue and we decided that the most direct way of
9 addressing this would be to have something on city
10 letterhead that is official that student veterans,
11 users of the GI Bill as well as academic institutions
12 could have and present to landlords. Now, our
13 experience has bee--for the most part it's been a
14 matter of ignorance. It's a matter of—of—of
15 informing landlords, and once they know the law and
16 they know what they're required to do, they do it,
17 but that also then led to our efforts again working
18 with the—our veteran service organization partners
19 such as the Veterans Alliance and IAVA and the Public
20 Advocate and this committee and others to work with
21 the Human Right Commission and to add veterans as a
22 protected class to the city's Human Rights Law, and
23 that now gives us kind of two-fold strategy. We both
24 have the information upfront that any student veteran
25 or use of the GI Bill can download from our website

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2 and take it to the landlord, but in the event that
3 that that landlord even given that information
4 refuses to do the right thing, then that student
5 veteran or GI Bill user has recourse at the city
6 level. We're very excited about that. It's an
7 important message I think that not only does the
8 federal government through the USERRA Laws, they've
9 got our vets—our student veterans backs. The state
10 has protections, but this is a way of New York City
11 telling our veterans and their families, wait, your
12 city, your hometown, your community and neighborhood
13 we have your back.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, what has been
15 DVS' experience since the delays in regards to this?
16 Like how many people came back? How many people
17 called DVS, and how—how large is the issue right now?

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We think that there
19 are still approximately 3,000 student veterans and
20 their family members GI Bill users who are at risk in
21 the city. What we have found since we issued the
22 memorandum a little over a month ago now we found
23 that actually very few veterans have had to utilize
24 the—the rent eviction mechanism. We think that much
25 like our experience with the BAH and the income

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2 provision that we had issued the initial memorandum a
3 couple of years earlier, we think that just the—the
4 publicity of distributing that memorandum and
5 educating our landlords and our students that (1)
6 this was a federal glitch. This was not the fault of
7 the—the inaction or the irresponsibility of a given
8 GI Bill user. We—we have reason to believe that that
9 in itself has exercised a protective impact. So,
10 we're very proud of this. We've been consulted by
11 other cities across the country who have asked what
12 have we done and how can they replicate what we have
13 done to provide that backstop at the city level, and
14 we're proud to share our experience in any way we
15 possibly can. Every student veteran and their
16 family member deserves to study in the confidence and
17 security of knowing that they have a roof over their
18 head, and that their livelihood and their family's
19 livelihood will not be put at risk.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How did we get the
21 number 3,000?

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We get the number
23 3,000 because the—the primary population of veterans
24 that's being affected are the new entrants, the new
25 enrollees, and so it's—admittedly, it's an estimate,

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but in talking with our student veteran coordinators across the network of campuses in the city, that's our best estimate at what it is that we're looking at, at an at-risk population. Potentially any of our 12,000 GI Bill users could be at risk, but that's why we widely spread and disseminated that memorandum, which was picked up. You may have seen the coverage. NBC News did a national news report on it, MPR. It was really great coverage of this to be able to get the news out not only to our New York City veterans and their family members, but as I said well beyond.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright. So, do we have information on the thousand—those 3,000? It's just a number right? Do we have—do we have like contact information? Do we—do we know like let's say there are 12,000 veterans, do we have like information on them if a mailing or to contact each person?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, the most efficient way that we have designed our communication is to be in contact with each institution student veteran coordinator, and the thorough the student veteran coordinator who, of course, has access to all of the students' personal information, they can get

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2 the information out. We do not send information out
3 directly to those 12,000 students. We-we want those
4 students to hear from the student veteran
5 coordinators about what-whatever issues are germane
6 to their-their educational experience.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, the campuses
8 would sent out a mailing to the student veterans? Is
9 that how it works?

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes. So-so in-in
11 the instance of this most recent a little over a
12 month ago with the GI Bill BAH funding glitch, our
13 student veteran coordinators widely disseminated that
14 information both through email as well as websites,
15 of course on our website and in the national news
16 coverage. In any way we possibly could get the word
17 out, we have continued to encourage folks to spread
18 the word.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, would all
20 12,000 students directly get a mailing from the
21 campuses as far as you know?

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: As far as we know
23 the-the student veteran coordinators send that
24 information forward and then one would assume that
25 the 12,000 student veteran population who are

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2 connected to the student veteran population would
3 then get that information. Absolutely.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is there any way to
5 like make sure that they get it? Like, you know, you
6 said you—you're assuming that they're getting. So,
7 Cassandra, is there something that DVS does to follow
8 up with the campuses to make sure that the
9 collaboration is there, and that—that these 12,000
10 students receive that information?

11 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Yes, absolutely, and
12 as I mentioned, we have an open dialogue with most
13 campuses that have large student veteran populations.
14 So they're always able to reach out to me directly as
15 well.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, all 12,000
17 received a notice saying that if they need help or if
18 they need a letter from DVS, we are there for you to—
19 to get these lists?

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Chair Deutsch, we
21 sent the information to each student veteran
22 coordinator, and their responsibility then is to
23 disseminate that among their student veteran
24 population.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, the Coordinator
of DVS?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, no, the—the
active—the—the school student veteran coordinator.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is there follow-up
after that to make sure?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And then the
follow-up becomes--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yes,
that's what I'm asking you. Is there—what's the
follow-up after that? After you reach out to the—to
the—to the coordinator in each campus, what's the
follow-up after that to ensure that something was
done?

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: So, we've sent the
information multiple times actually. It was in our
newsletter. We sent it out over social media, and
again I have actually called a few of the schools to
check in on them to see how things are going
specifically the schools with the largest
populations. I have an open dialogue with Fordham
with the MCC, the schools that have again the biggest
population. So, I was just on the phone with a few
of those school last night.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, I-I just want to make sure that the 25--especially the 25 CUNY Campuses that there is a follow-up to make sure--

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: [interposing] Yeah, and--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --that each and every student--

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: [interposing] Yeah, and we--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --receives--

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: --we work--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] I-I know and it seems like there's like 3,400 but there's 12,000--

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: [interposing] Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --total.

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: There's 3,400--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yeah.

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: --in CUNY and we work closely with Lisa Beatha as well. We actually hosted our--our Vet Connect service provider and meeting at the CUNY Veterans Summit in November. So, we've got a great working relationship with Lisa, and we are even on a texting basis with each other. So, we are

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2 in frequent communication and she knows that we are
3 an ample support system for their efforts.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so, we'll be
5 hearing testimony soon from--from others. So, before
6 I continue, I just want to--[background
7 comments/pause] Okay. So, I'm going to ask my Co-
8 Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you, Chair
10 Deutsch. I appreciate that. I just have a few
11 questions. What would it take for you to directly do
12 a mailing to all of the veterans so that you know for
13 sure that they received the information rather than
14 rely on--put an intermediary step in and have the
15 colleges do that? Well, let's say if you were to
16 directly--

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] That
18 would be one potential course of action--

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Uh-hm.

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --but as I
21 mentioned earlier, we think it's important for our
22 student veteran and GI Bill user population to know
23 that their specific institution is providing them
24 with the information that is necessary to protect
25 their interest.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Well, I'm just saying
as a secondary step as a back-up, that instead of--

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
that's one course-course of action, but we haven't
found that to be necessary. If at-if at any point it
becomes, you know, something that we think could be
added to, we'll-we'll certainly consider that.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's fine.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I will say that in
the-in the urgency of getting things out over these
last several weeks, we have chosen the most efficient
and effective means of doing so through not only
student veteran coordinators but through national and
local news coverage as well as social media, and
we'll certainly continue to consider every possible
means of getting information out.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay. So, the GI
Bill pays for 36 months. Is that correct?

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, that is
correct.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And most students
would go to a semester, which would be five months
and if they did two years, I mean a full year that
would be 10 months?

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It depends.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Right.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Some students go year round, but it does—you—you point to I think or you allude to one of the challenges, and that is since the basic allowance for housing is paid only during the time at a--

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Right.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --GI Bill user is in school. One has to be careful to pro rate one's housing costs for example so that you're not using up the full amount of the month BAH on your rent because if you do choose to take let's say a break or a summer break in education, then you will not be getting BAH. So, it does—it does point to the need for student veterans to work closely with their institutions that have experts who work with them on exactly those kinds of issues.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Then also in terms of only providing 36 months of GI coverage for tuition, what—how do you—how do you utilize CLEP so that students will know that there might be other credits that they attain that would help them that

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2 they can apply that would help them attain their
3 degrees.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'm so glad you
5 asked the Chair Barron because, you know, when we
6 first started the Veterans on Campus Initiative, we
7 did some focus group testing starting with our own
8 office, student veterans and their family members who
9 had used the BI Bill, and we asked them: What do you
10 know about the CLEP program? The first—after the
11 first ten folks we—we polled said they had never
12 heard of the CLEP program, we knew that we had a
13 challenge on our hands, which is why we have reached
14 out to the college for it, and it's not only the CLEP
15 program that we are highlighting to ensure not just
16 that our veterans but our service members and their
17 family. Before they ever leave their—their—their—
18 their posts, camps and stations they know about the
19 CLEP program. One of the things that the College
20 Board is doing now is they work very closely to now
21 connect students who are taking the CLEP
22 examinations, they connect them to non-profit
23 organizations for example like the Posse Foundation
24 who then really help. You know, the College Board
25 shines the light on their situation, and then the

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2 non-profits help them to find the best fit at the
3 best institution for their needs and their strengths.
4 So, we're very excited about that partnership with
5 the College Board. Another program that I think
6 bears mentioning is the College Board's partnership
7 with the Con Academy because these are free materials
8 that the College Board's research has shown that on
9 average 20 hours of devoted study and preparation
10 with those free materials yield a 100 point increase
11 in SAT scores. So, think of this. The College Board
12 didn't—they did sort of an assessment when we, you
13 know, sort of served up this challenge with the New
14 York City School System. They looked at CUNY and
15 they were drawn to John Jay's existing policies and
16 came back to us and said, Did you know that at John
17 Jay today a-a-a young man or woman who has raised
18 their right hand and joined the military, worked hard
19 to apply their military training for college credit,
20 has worked hard in uniform to get accredited college
21 credits can leave John—can leave the service two
22 semester shy of a four-year degree under the case
23 policies. So that really got our juices going to
24 think about boy, if we can transform the whole notion
25 of what it is to serve to help our 18 to 24-

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Right.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --year-olds

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understand that this can be a path to the middle-

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class. For our immigrant families this can be a path

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to citizenship, and if you work hard from the day you

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start military service this will be an investments in

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your lifetime of service.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And then finally

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before I turn it back to the Co-Chair here, the GI

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Bill then pays tuition at whatever institution they

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approve regardless of what that tuition costs?

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay, so, this is

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where it gets a little complicated, but the GI Bill

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pays a certain level of tuition, and it varies by

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school, but then some schools can--have made the

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choice to opt into the Yellow Ribbon Program, which

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the Federal VA partners to in many cases make up the

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entire difference, but this varies from institution

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to institution.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So there's a cap on

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how tuition you will pay?

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: The--I'll need to

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get back to you on the details of that. I know that

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it varies by institution. Some of our institutions

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2 here can probably give you more detailed reporting on
3 that, but I do know that for some schools the Yellow
4 Benefit Program takes care of the entire tuition
5 bill, and many student veterans and their family
6 members benefit greatly from that additional push so
7 that they don't get out of college in--in considerable
8 debt. It would be less debt than if they didn't have
9 the GI Bill, but still considerable debt.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So, it's possible
11 then that a veteran might want to go to one of your
12 more elite institutions and there's a cap that the GI
13 Bill would provide for tuition, and if he doesn't get
14 the benefit of the Yellow Ribbon Program that--that
15 veteran person or he or she might not be able to go.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That--that--that is--
17 that is correct. Let me just describe a little more
18 detail here, Madam Chair. Under the Yellow Ribbon
19 Program the post 9/11 GI Bill pays all resident
20 tuition and fees for a public school, the lower of
21 the actual tuition and fees or the national maximum
22 for academic year for a private school. So, that's
23 where it gets a little complex and hairy. (sic)

24 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Say
25 that again, the lower--say that one.

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2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We'll provide this
3 to you as well, Madam Chair--

4 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay,

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --but the lower of
6 the actual tuition and fees or the national maximum
7 per academic year for a private school. If your
8 actual tuition and fees exceed these costs if you're
9 attending a private school or attending a public
10 school as a non-resident student for example--

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Uh-hm.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --then degree
13 granting institutions participating in the Yellow
14 Ribbon Program agree to make additional funds
15 available for the educational programs without adding
16 an additional charge to the GI Bill entitlement. So,
17 institutions voluntarily enter into these Yellow
18 Ribbon Agreements with the VA and choose the amount
19 of tuitions and fees that will be contributed. The
20 VA matches that amount and issues payments directly
21 to the institution.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Do, all of New York
23 City's institutions participate in this Yellow Ribbon
24 Grant (sic) program?
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2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, not-not-not all
3 do.

4 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, I would love
5 to get that information writing so that I could
6 research a little bit further.

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] We
8 will absolutely—we will absolutely provide that to
9 you, Madam Chair. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you, Council
11 Member.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. I just
13 want to recognize we have—we were joined by Council
14 Member Paul Vallone and--[background comments] Oh,
15 Drew just left. Okay. Commissioner, how many of the—
16 of the city's 210,000 veterans are qualified for the
17 GI-pre 9/11 and post-9/11 GI Bill.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We know that
19 approximately 12,000 are using the GI Bill. I don't
20 have data that would point to a specific number who
21 are eligible, but not using it. We do know that
22 about 10% of our veteran population here in New York
23 City is post-9/11. So, they're at the prime age
24 range to use their GI Bill, but for whatever reason,
25 you know, not everyone uses it or uses it right away,

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and that's been one of the real benefits of the Forever GI Bill that was passed this year is there's not longer that 15-year time limit so it really gives veterans and their families the flexibility to figure out what's really best for their needs and, of course, it's transferrable to family members as well. So, it's-it's-it's a wonderful benefit and we know, this is a benefit that was started on behalf of our World War II returning veterans 1944, but one thing I must-I cannot fail to mention is that we know that it was not open to all of our returning World War II veterans, our African-American World War II veterans came back to this country were not able to use their GI Bill, were not able to use their VA Home Loan, and hence were not able to gather wealth over a period of generations and transferred to that-to their children and their-their-their subsequent generations as many other veterans were able to do, and have done. So, I think that it's important to recognize that we have come a long way as a country, but we still have a long way to go, and that particularly gets to some of the predatory practices, Madam Chair, that you had mentioned earlier and things that we have be vigilant about to ensure that student veterans and their

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family members GI Bill user and all students not just veterans all students have the safeguards that one will assist them with loan repayment if they've gotten into a bad situation with a bad actor school that's either gone out of business or is given a worthless degree, and they're settled with debt and no path to a career. Or, those who were promised gainful employment by going to a career, trade or vocational school and the school, the institution had delivered no such outcome. We have to be vigilant and on guard and—and protective of those who are after all our city's and our nation's future.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, you have 12,000 student veterans who are using the GI Bill. So from the 12,000 how many are being used directly by the veteran, and then how many are being transferred over to a family member?

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: We don't have that breakdown.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We don't have that breakdown, but we can—we can query our student veteran coordinators, and we get—can get a breakdown on for you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright. I think
3 it's important to—to figure out how many are being
4 used by a family member.

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Now, from—from the
7 210,000 you said that there's 1,200–12,000 who are
8 using the GI Bill.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How do we reach out
11 to the veterans who may be eligible who are not using
12 it? Do we have a—could we figure out a number or how
13 many more may be qualified to—to use the GI Bill, if
14 not directly or having their family member use--

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Well,
16 and this is where--

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] -use
18 the GI Bill.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: -- think we've--
20 we've testified briefly here in this committee about
21 our Veterans Success Network, but let—let me unpack
22 it a little further with you because it's got three
23 pillars. The first pillar is our Veterans on Campus
24 Initiative shining a bright light on best practices
25 and bringing in national best practices and really

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2 bringing that to bear for our student veterans and
3 their family members. The second pillar is our
4 mentor, a vet. So, particularly now with the launch
5 of Vet Connect NYC, we're not only in a position to
6 connect our New Yorkers whether they're new veterans,
7 whether they're looking to make a career change, at
8 whatever stage of life they're in, but also for
9 service members and their families who were serving
10 at posts, camps and installations around the world
11 who have already made that decision: We're not
12 recruiting. If you've still got time to deliver to
13 our national security, we want you to do that, but if
14 you made the decision that now is that time, we want
15 to invite those native New Yorkers and other critters
16 like me who come from all parts of this country to
17 find their next mission in New York. Link them up
18 with a mentor, and that's really a powerful way of
19 getting this kind of information to our new vets
20 coming on board as well as the myriad other ways that
21 we work with social media, we work with our news
22 letter, we work with our partner organizations, and
23 we'll—we'll continue to tool up on our ways that we
24 can continue to communicate and better connect

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2 services, care, benefits with our veterans and their
3 family members.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I appreciate
5 all of the outreach that you're doing—the DVS does on
6 this. I want to see—I want to find a way to see if
7 we could do like major—major campaign in New York
8 City. Tuition, you know, is not—not cheap and we
9 don't know how many people may be paying offers to
10 invest when they—they might be just eligible for 100%
11 free college. So, I want to see how we could work
12 together with the advocates that are here to do like
13 a really a major, major campaign because people
14 obviously--

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Let's
16 make 2019 a breakout year--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: [interposing]
18 Yes.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --in that regard,
20 Mr. Chair, and I will just say one note of caution
21 getting back Madam Chair to your earlier--

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] I—I
23 just wanted that information about—I was speaking at
24 a high school graduation--

25 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure.

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COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: --and I

3

mentioned about the GI Bill, and a veteran approached

4

me soon after saying, Oh, you know, she has a child

5

who's going to--he's going to college.

6

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

7

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, so I know that

8

in one graduation the one veteran approached me

9

saying he had no--he had no idea--

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yeah.

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COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: --but I think

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that from 210,000 you have 12,000 who are using it so

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there has to--there must be a higher than that.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Oh, yes.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: There has to be a

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higher number. So, if we know that even if it's

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12,001 even for that one person--

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] It's

19

worth the effort.

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COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah, yeah, I'm--

21

I'm just--I'm trying to--just we happen to be online,

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but I want to figure out a way that we could work

23

together and we have all the advocates to do like a

24

major campaign. You know, we're constantly, you

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know, the city tries to do as much as possible for

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2 those that just can't make ends meet, and here we
3 have the resources, the resources—I don't have to
4 tell you. The resources are there, and all we need
5 to do is really reach out to the 8.6 million New
6 Yorkers, right, and 210,000 of those are veterans.
7 You have five boroughs, you have 51 Council Members,
8 you have assembly members, State senators. Let's do
9 a major, you know, campaign to reach out to the
10 entire city. If you know a veteran, you know, if you
11 know a veteran let us know, and let's make sure that
12 every single veteran in this city knows that they are
13 eligible through the GI Bill for free education, and
14 let's really kick off 2019 and—and making sure. So,
15 I'm looking forward, Commissioner to work with you
16 and working with all of the great advocates.

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. From
18 your lips to God's ears, Mr. Chair, this is work
19 worth doing, and we—we look forward to partnering
20 with you and our great community here in New York
21 City to do that work. One just cautionary note
22 getting back to Chair Barron your question earlier
23 about directly contacting the student veterans, the
24 12,000. I'm reminded that there are privacy concerns
25 that we don't have access to their direct personal

1
2 information. Again, that—that is why we rely on the
3 schools and the institutions to be able to contact
4 them, but I think what you're saying, Mr. Chair, and
5 I think what we can all agree on is that there are
6 things we can do to build on what we've already done
7 to get that word out everywhere. Make New York City
8 the beacon of light of hope, of inspiration for all
9 of our veteran and their loved ones. That's
10 something we need to be proud of in the new year.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, thank you.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, I'm going
14 to ask my colleagues they have a few questions.
15 We'll start with Council Member Holden.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thanks
17 Commissioner for your testimony and—and for all your
18 great work. I think, you know, to echo Chair
19 Deutsch's concern, I—I—we have 12,000 student
20 veterans who—who are utilizing the post-911 GI Bill.
21 I—I'd—we'd like to know how many are out there.
22 That's a very important figure. How many are we
23 reaching? Is 12,000 good? Is that bad? You know, I
24 would think a lot more are eligible and their
25 families that we really to—to-to reach and—and social

1
2 media is—is great because it doesn't cost anything
3 really for—if you can give us something we can put on
4 our Council page—pages and--

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
6 absolutely.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: --and really do,
8 you know, all Council Members I think should
9 participate. I'd like to see that, and I just have a
10 few questions on—you mentioned the CLEP program. Is
11 there a cap on the credit allowances of that program?

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There is a cap.
13 I'll need to get those details. We'll be glad to
14 provide those to you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay.

16 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: It varies by
17 institution as well.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: It varies and is
19 it—does it vary by in CUNY?

20 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Yes, it does.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Should it?

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We're not in a
23 position to comment on that.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I know, but I'd
25 like—

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --on-on policy. I-

I-that's not my field of expertise, but it does vary.

I'm sure when you speak to--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [interposing] And

when we--yeah, when we hear the other testimony--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]

Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: --maybe we can

get that information. Do you know what colleges have

the greatest veteran population in New York City?

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We do. We'd be

glad to provide you. We've got a list of the top--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [interposing] I'd

just like a few top ones, yea.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. We've got

NYU. We've got a number of the CUNY, you know,

3,400. So, a quarter of the GI Bill user population

is from CUNY, Columbia I would say has just made

great strides. Again Dean Allen, I just want to

recognize you and your team, but Columbia now enrolls

more student veterans [coughing] and GI Bill users

than all of the other Ivy League schools combined,

which is amazing, and what Columbia is doing with

1
2 their massive online education program is that they
3 are reaching out to community colleges across the
4 country. Several months ago, I was at an event and I
5 ran into two student veterans who are now roommates,
6 and I asked them, you know, what are you doing?
7 Well, they just enrolled in Columbia. One was from
8 Texas, one was from Louisiana, and they had met and
9 they were roommates there, but—and it was because of
10 the massive online program, which is free to any of
11 our institutions. That's one of the reasons we've
12 started out these Veterans on Campus program by going
13 to visit and shining a light on the existing best
14 practices and then bringing in the national best
15 practices from the Student Veterans of America and
16 College Board. So, we'll—this—this is an ongoing
17 program that we'll continue build on the many schools
18 here in New York City where veterans and their family
19 members are thriving. We've got a—if you want to
20 just—any of the other and some—you know, we've—we've
21 gone to 12 schools in the CUNY system. We've gone to
22 Manhattan College. We've gone to Pace, we've gone to
23 NYU, to Columbia, to Fordham. I mean there—you know,
24 we've got such a treasure trove of higher educational
25 institutions. In fact, just to, you know, Medgar

1
2 Evers, it was just about a month ago right after
3 Veterans Day, Medgar Evers as an example had a
4 wonderful program honoring the history and the legacy
5 of Medgar Evers himself as well as honoring their
6 student veterans and highlighting their service to
7 the—the community and the students at large. It's—
8 it's—it's heartening. I could tell you story after
9 story of school here. For example, Manhattan
10 College. They taught—told—told us about not only
11 this holistic wellness program that provide their
12 student veterans, but they also told us about how the
13 evolution of their student veterans participation and
14 their role in campus life. Then it started out
15 where, yeah, they were just glad to find each other.
16 They had a student veteran lounge. They kind of let
17 their hair down, they tell war stories, you know, as
18 we veterans tend to do. You know, there I was. You
19 know, at some, yeah, you know, okay but what can we
20 do because service is embedded in our DNA. Once we've
21 taken that vow, we want to continue serving others.
22 So, the students of Manhattan College they decided to
23 work with their faculty and fellow students to
24 organize panels that could then illustrate various
25 aspects of life in service, deployment to war and

1
2 it's just stirred up a whole other level of
3 intellectual and emotional and spiritual richness on
4 that campus. There are best practices across this
5 college, and I could—and I mentioned John Jay already
6 in terms of what they've done and BMCC has been just
7 such a great partner--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [interposing] And
9 they're sharing that with the—the other schools
10 currently?

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, that's--

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] We
14 had a—we had a civic program (sic) with BMCC just
15 this last year. We brought in city leaders from
16 across city government where we talked to student
17 veterans and their family members about the very
18 civil service opportunities that are ready. So,
19 we're—we're excited about what we have learned over
20 these first few months of the Veterans on Campus
21 campaign and we also—what I didn't mention in
22 addition to the second pillar, which is the Mentor a
23 Vet. Anyone who wants to serve as a mentor, we're
24 happy. Cass again is the lead for that, 25
25 organizations that we help match the best for

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2 veterans and their family members. The third pillar
3 it's called our Veteran Career Council. It's
4 currently under construction. It will be launched
5 early in this new year. We're very excited. It's a
6 public-private partnership where we bring in six or
7 seven different industries starting with city
8 government, which is—we already hired the most number
9 of veterans in the city, over 9,000 veterans, service
10 members, reservists and national guards members, but
11 we want to be able to work with industry leads from
12 industries real estate, finance and banking,
13 technology. This being New York, fashion, media and
14 entertainment, health and healthcare. So, that those
15 industry leads can influence their colleagues in
16 those industries to open up externships and
17 internships so student veterans can get career
18 relevant work experience while they're tuning up
19 their—their educational credentials and—and
20 qualifications. So, we're very excited about the—the
21 landscape and the—not only the landscape as it
22 current exists in New York City, we know that this is
23 just such a rich area for—for student veterans and
24 their loved ones to gain world class education and
25 training, but we're also excited about where we can

1
2 take that, and communication is a huge piece of that.

3 So, we welcome the opportunity to

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [interposing]

5 Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --both with your
7 committee on Higher Education as well as the
8 Committee on Veterans anyone else who wants to be
9 part of this campaign. We're all in.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Great. Thanks.

11 Just one other question I guess, while teaching at
12 CUNY, I had many students that--many student veterans.
13 They started their college life, and then were either
14 drafted or went into the service, and this sort of
15 might--might have been like 10 or 15 years lapse in
16 their education. Many of their credits, their prior
17 credits expired. Is there any program that's
18 currently in the colleges that honor those credits?
19 Because they were called into service or they did
20 serve, and the--their credits shouldn't expire, and
21 that's fine.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: One of the best
23 practices that we've observed at the colleges and
24 universities that we've met with are those
25 institutions that take a personalized approach, that

1
2 sit down with an individual perspective student and
3 look at their record, and figure out how can they
4 make the most of whatever prior college they have
5 gotten their military credits that they've gotten in
6 uniform, but I will say this: As we were reminded
7 yesterday—I testified yesterday in Albany on veteran
8 employment—there was a witness there who testified
9 who works with veteran—student veterans and their
10 family members on a regular basis, and, you know, he
11 made the point. He said, you know, we have to get
12 the word out to our student veterans and their family
13 members who can make use of this national treasure
14 the GI Bill. If they start out at a poor performing
15 school, that then limits—that—that defines the
16 trajectory of what they can then connect to from that
17 point forward. So, if we can get them to a good
18 start, then it just opens up the—the pathways to
19 education going forward, and that's—that's what this
20 is all about. Understanding that not every veteran
21 or family member wants to be, you know, a tie guys we
22 used to say in the Army, or doesn't want to be in
23 banking or finance, doesn't want to carry a brief
24 case and go to work every morning. That's where the
25 forever GI Bill is fantastic the way it's opened the

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2 doors to intensive coding training programs for
3 example where, you know, good paying jobs \$75,
4 \$80,000 a year after a few months of intense
5 training. Or, you know here at DCAS we know that our
6 trades positions, you know, our workforce is aging
7 out. There are opportunities for student veterans
8 and their loved ones to get that training. Helmets
9 to Hard Hats they also testified yesterday at Albany.
10 What a fantastic program to take folks--whatever
11 their strengths are we need—we need our student
12 veterans, their family members. They are our
13 advanced leading natural renewable resource, and
14 what's to be renewed? Their commitment to and
15 capacity for ongoing service.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay great.
17 Thank you. Thank you very much.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, I
20 just want to ask you, Commissioner, could we get
21 something from DVS over the next few weeks so this
22 way we could start up our massive campaign in
23 January? So, this way we could give them out to—to
24 members, elected officials and just start blasting it
25 out and letting people know.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That's sounds
great, Chair Deutsch.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Also you
mentioned Columbia has--has a--the highest number of
veterans, student veterans. Do we have--?

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: I have the highest.
(sic)

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I mentioned that
they have more student veterans, and it will be good
for you to query them directly--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --but more student
veterans and GI Bill users, which include family
members--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yeah,
I'm sure about that.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --than all other
Ivy League institutions combined.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do we have the
numbers? Do--do you have the numbers on--on the 25
campuses?

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Yes. We don't have
that with us right now, but we do have those numbers.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] We'll
give that enrollment. Absolutely, yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. So, I--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] And I
would say about Columbia, and this is true for all--
all of our schools--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --you know,
attracting student veterans and their loved ones to
enroll in your program, it doesn't happen by
accident. There are keys to success. There are best
practices, and our goal, we're not educators, we're
not academics, but we're, you know, at DVS our
mission is veterans and our--and their families.
That's our only mission, and so we're so excited to
be able to spread best practices. Yesterday, Mike
Haney, Dr. Haney who's the Vice Chancellor as well as
the Director--the founding Director of the Institute for
Veterans and Military Families in Syracuse. Talk
about what a difference in leadership makes. Five
years ago their incoming Chancellor made student
veterans and their family members one of the top four
pillars of his strategic aims. They had about 200 GI
Bill users five years ago. Today they've got over

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2 1,3000 and they were just named the top academic
3 institution. Is veteran, the top veteran--student
4 veteran friendly institution in the country. So,
5 we've got around us--we are surrounded by institutions
6 who are dedicated to do the right thing, who won't
7 implement best practices, and our job is shine a big
8 light and let them know what's going on out there so
9 we can accelerate that process.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, do we know for
11 example what Columbia is doing different than the
12 other campuses that the--that they have more people,
13 more veterans who are using the GI Bill--

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Well,
15 I think one of--

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --as high as that
17 camp--you know, the campaign?

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. So, one of
19 the things that they've done is they've--they've added
20 to their massive online course material. One of
21 their courses is a course that's entitled *Learning*
22 *About Learning* or words to that effect. It's
23 something close to that.

24 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: [interposing] The
25 university has that. (sic)

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It's within in the--
the School of General Studies, and again Dean Allen
is--is our expert our resident expert and pioneer of
this approach--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Uh-
hm.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --but this is part
of their offering that goes out free to community
colleges. It's--it's freely accessible, and it goes
out to community colleges and it introduces the
notion to student veterans or service members who
haven't yet made that decision, but it introduces the
notion that, you know, they can set their sites and
come to New York City, and whether it's going to
Columbia or whether it's going to one of our CUNY
campuses, I mean, you know, there's no one
institution that's right for everyone, but certainly
we can learn from those right here in our midst who
have already found ways of better connecting and
attracting and matching to make sure that our student
veterans and their loved ones get the best fit for
what their needs, strengths, goals and aspirations
may be.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, was this information like relates to the other 24 campuses telling them, you know, something, Columbia is setting a good example here?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. So--so in January, and as we've gone around and talked to the various campuses and school presidents and provosts and leaders, what we promised them is that we will be publishing a *Keys to Success* that will come out in January, and so, Columbia certainly has a best practice, but we've got numerous CUNY--every institution we've been to has at least one best practice that we want to be able to shine a light on for all of the other campuses to learn from.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I'm--I'm going to be working with my colleague Chair Barron, and I know she has--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
Right.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --a staff member who is a veteran, and--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Terrific.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, she's--and we're going to see if we could possibly reach out to

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2 CUNY to see if we could set up a meeting between all
3 25 campuses, and DVS and the Commissioner and the
4 advocates to see how we could all figure out how to
5 do a better job and what resources CUNY may need in
6 order to do more outreach, and I think that, you
7 know, Columbia is setting a good example. And let's
8 have a CUNY competition, right?

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, I think,
10 Chair Deutsch you're going to have to add in Fordham
11 and PACE and NYU. There are a whole bunch of folks
12 in that competition, but competition is good.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] SO,
14 yes, and New--and New York City--in New York City you
15 have--you have 25, right?

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There you go.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, it's not--it's
18 not--it's not a long distance for someone to travel to
19 be in New York City if you could ask someone from a
20 different state to come in, it's going to be a little
21 more difficult. So, let's start from New York City,
22 and then we'll see. We'll take it from there.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It's like Arthur
24 Ash said--

25 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yeah.

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2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: -Start where you
3 are, use what you have, do what you can. Let's do
4 it.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, I'd like to
6 ask Council Member Vallone if he has some questions.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you to
8 both of you of our chairs. [background comments] Good
9 morning, Commissioner.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Good morning.

11 CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: Boy is your
12 enthusiasm needed after yesterday's Amazon hearings.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'm telling you.

14 CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: I'm still
15 recovering from that afternoon. [laughter] It's
16 always a pleasure to see you. Merry Christmas and
17 Happy Holidays to you and the staff.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Thank
19 you so much.

20 CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: I hope your season
21 is good. (sic) This is a very important topic and I
22 think Chair Barron and I were just leaning over and
23 talking about the numbers and I understand the
24 pillars and the enthusiasm, and all of that. I'm
25 looking for some maybe a specific goal or program

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2 that you can target that can help the numbers when
3 you see the drastic drop from undergraduate to
4 graduate, and this is just looking at the 2018
5 numbers, but it's—it's quite, quite startling to see
6 that how few veterans are actually pursuing in the
7 CUNY world to graduate studies. So, being one of
8 those tie guys, although not today. [laughter] It's
9 not such a bad career to go after. I think all three
10 generations we've done pretty good at it. So, I'd
11 like to see maybe what you are thinking on how we can
12 get those numbers up?

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, the way we
14 conceptualize this, Council Member Vallone, is we
15 conceptualize a virtuous cycle of service, and so our
16 Veterans on Campus Initiative has started where are
17 to shine a light on existing best practices. Now,
18 with launch of Vet Connect NYC, we're working with
19 the Pentagon, and with the branches of service so
20 that we can connect with service members and their
21 families wherever they're located around the world.
22 So, there's--

23 CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: [interposing] But
24 do you see that connection leading to—like is there
25 is there a barrier with someone there.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Okay,
so--so--so hear me out. Hear me out, Council Member
Vallone. We're just--

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: [interposing]
You're going on as you--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yeah,
we're on--we're on our way to that circuit. So that's--
that's connecting the 12 to 15 months before they've
actually gotten out of uniform--

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: [interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --which is the
ideal time to connect, and then moving around that
circle to be able to portray--this gets to what Chair
Deutsch, Chair Barron. We've been talking about that
through the communication strategy to be able to up-
end the prevailing narrative of veterans that either
portrays them as heroes that are untouchable, or
somehow defective or worst of all invisible. We're
human beings and the struggles are real, but the--the
strengths are also real. We're going to lead with
those strengths and feature the faces and the voices
and the stories of veterans and their family members,
the vibrance, the resilience, the flourishing lives
that they're leading and then that has an impact on

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2 the parents, teachers, counselors and coaches who are
3 guiding and directing today's 18 to 24-year-olds.
4 Now, this is how this connects this--this circle of--of
5 service, the virtual circle of service.

6 CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: [interposing] The
7 circle of life. I'm about to start singing the Lion
8 King.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Councilman, back to
10 your question. [laughter] It is that we know that
11 if we can communicate to those 18 to 24-year-olds who
12 are entering service about the fact that if they view
13 as an investment in their life service, and start
14 working hard to apply their military credits, their
15 college credits--accredited courses that they do while
16 they're in uniform, that today at John Jay with
17 existing policies, they can get out and be two
18 semesters short of a 4-year degree. Now, if we also
19 get to those young men and women, and let them know
20 about the College Board programs so the CLEP courses
21 that can help them rack and stack credits without
22 having to use their GI Bill, and also be able to jack
23 up their SAT scores by using the free Con Academy
24 scores, you can see then they can draw a scholarship.

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CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: [interposing] Well,
that's what Councilman was referring to.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And they're in a
position to use more of their GI bill for graduate
programs. That's absolutely for--that--that's the only
way--

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CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: [interposing] So
you think the biggest impediment is-is the--

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes .

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CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: --course attainment
and the level of getting--sometimes with the--the
barriers there it could be either the entrance exam,
the credits attained, the ability to get past that
hurdle just like with specialized schools versus non-
specialized schools--

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Sure.

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CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: --they should be
trying to gain. Just want to make sure we're
providing that---the tool base so that it's an option
for our GIs to take that level--

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
Absolutely.

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CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: --and not just
leave it to them to have to figure it out.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Precisely.

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: That's—that's the
biggest part.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] And
that's where not only the trained peer-to-peer social
support is so vital, but also the mentorship supports
that they can use—they can learn from their fellow
veterans who perhaps have not made the best choices,
got kind of caught up in that scrum (sic) of figuring
out on their own.

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: Or maybe we can
extend the partnership so like with Columbia and
Fordham and Syracuse and the schools that you
mentioned--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: --from the
graduate-undergraduate to the graduate school.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We've got so many
success stories at the—at the schools that are right
here within our reach, and we can tell their stories,
and we can—we can—we can help guide incoming
veterans, service members and family members to
understand that the resources are there to help them
make the best decisions for their futures.

1

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CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: Fordham like for us
so, I'm sure it will work.

4

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There you go.

5

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: Thank you, Chairs.

6

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Alright.

7

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: I appreciate it.

8

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So,
Commissioner, we spoke about veterans who might not
have knowledge that they're eligible for education,
free education if they're part of the GI Bill. But
we didn't speak about how many of the 210,000
veterans may not know that they are eligible for the
GI Bill.

15

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

16

17

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, is it possible
from the 210,000 veterans that some of those veterans
may not even—may not even know that they're eligible
for the GI Bill?

19

20

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It—it's certainly
possible. You know, I would—I would say that for
that proportion of our veteran population that tends
to be younger or is more media savvy, and is
connected to social media and to the Internet, and
with those kinds of communication pieces, it would be

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1
2 more unlikely, but I would never say that that news
3 has—has reached and penetrated the consciousness of
4 every veteran in our midst, and I think that it—you
5 know, for example one of the issues they talked about
6 yesterday again in Albany, was the challenge of the
7 TAP, the Trans—the Transitional Assistance Program,
8 and the Department of Defense continues to work to
9 improve that. In fact, they somebody there from the
10 Department of Defense who talked this—this later—
11 latest rendition, but so many times when service
12 members and their families are getting ready to
13 transition out, they've got so many things going on.
14 Maybe they have a medical condition. They're being
15 medically boarded, or maybe they've got, you know,
16 worries about their families. Whatever it is, you
17 know, moving, transitioning is such a stressful
18 period of time. So, we can't take for granted that
19 everyone knows about the programs that are available,
20 and I—I look forward to working with you and members
21 of this committee and the Committee on Higher
22 Education and anyone else who wants to join this
23 campaign, and of course, the best news of all is that
24 we're not alone. We've got advocates and giants in
25

1
2 our midst who are here today, and others throughout
3 our great city.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, I
5 have two-two more questions. Then I'm going to go to
6 my Co-Chair. So, people are sure-have-are viewing
7 this at home. Maybe not. Maybe they're watching
8 something else. I mean it so happens. (sic)

9 [background comment/laughter] So, we're here live.

10 So, I have two more questions for those who are
11 watching, and for anyone that knows a veteran who is
12 out there. It could be a-a friend a neighbor,
13 someone you just met. Like I met this morning at
14 Starbucks. I think I met three people who are in
15 this room. So, you-you're always walking around
16 meeting veterans and seeing people. So, my first
17 question to you, Commissioner and-and I hope that
18 this information gets passed along, is who-which
19 family members are eligible for the free GI Bill to
20 get this free education?

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Which-which family
22 members?

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, is it a-a
24 child, a spouse like--?

1

2

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]

3

Spouses as well as children.

4

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Children. A

5

cousin?

6

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I don't—I think

7

it's spouse and dependents. So, I think it has to be

8

an actually registered dependent of the--

9

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So

10

it's a dependent of that—of the veteran, a dependent

11

or family member?

12

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: But think of that,

13

what that means for our veterans to be able to pass

14

this benefit and share it with their children because

15

not every veteran coming out of the service, you

16

know, needs to necessarily go back to college.

17

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Is

18

it—is it also a sibling? [background comments]

19

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Now, so it's a

20

child, right?

21

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah.

22

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We all agree

23

children only? Okay.

24

MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] And spouses.

25

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Spouses.

1

2

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] So--so

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spouses and--

4

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]

5

Spouses, spouses and children. Okay. So, my second

6

question is if the--if a veteran or a family of a

7

veteran or a friend of a veteran--

8

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

9

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --needs to find out

10

if a certain veteran is eligible to be--to be part of

11

this GI Bill, what do they need to do? Who do they

12

call?

13

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah, so--so to

14

determine what benefits, eligibility, you know, we

15

contact our colleagues at the Federal VA and they

16

work with us. If a--if a prospective student veteran

17

is interested in a particular institution, we may

18

reach out to that institution and link them up with

19

the Student Veteran Coordinator who then helps them

20

sit down with their particular experts there. So,

21

there are a number of ways of determining that. Our

22

veterans themselves--

23

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]

24

What's--what's the easiest way if someone wants to

25

find out?

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2

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Online. You could

3

go--

4

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

5

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: -the-the Federal VA

6

has--has an online platform where you can do your own

7

self-assessment and research. For some people that

8

just doesn't work. That's one of the things that we

9

knew--

10

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So,

11

can they call--can they call DVS?

12

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There's a hotline.

13

They can call DVS.

14

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] A

15

hotline. So, what's--Have we got the number?

16

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] There

17

is also a Federal VA Hotline.

18

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, have we got

19

the--I want to know the easiest way for someone to

20

find out?

21

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Chair Deutsch, I

22

can't tell you the easiest way because there is no

23

cookie cutter answer for our veterans. Some really

24

like to do their own independent research online.

25

Others want to call the Federal, you know, GI Bill

1

2

Hotline. Others feel comfortable going to one of our
satellite veteran resource centers. So, that's why
we really work to provide something for everyone in
the preferred mode and means of communication that
fits their strengths.

7

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, again, I don't
know who to call, right, and--

9

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Start
with us.

10

11

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Okay, so how
do I reach out to you?

12

13

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay. So, you can
reach out to us either by social media #nycveterans.

14

15

You can call our number 212-416-5250. You can

16

contact us on Vet Connect NYC which is 833-VetsNYC.

17

I mean there's any number of ways that you can reach

18

out to us. You can--you can write a note to me

19

online. Just ask the Commissioner. Send me a note.

20

We get correspondence through City Hall all the time

21

for that mode. I get 311. If none of that makes

22

sense, 311. They'll get the message to us. We want

23

to just simplify, but we know we can't--simple is not

24

the same as single. Simple is providing a variety of

25

ways for folks to choose from, and for many folks 311

1
2 becomes that. Or, for example, our work with the
3 First Lady and the ThriveNYC Program. You know,
4 veterans can—can contact 1-888-NYCWELL. There are all
5 manner of ways for us to get in—in touch with each
6 other. We have over 80 vetted service providers
7 currently who are members of our VETConnect NYC
8 network. So, for example, you know, folks may be
9 working with the IAVA Rift (sic) Program, and have a
10 questions. IAVA may reach out to us. We may reach
11 out to them or we may, you know, choose to reach out
12 to Coco Culhane because we've got a legal question,
13 or their expert legal service providers. I mean
14 that's the joy of having the team that we built
15 knowing that we can't do everything, but our
16 particular strength is being able to develop the
17 relationships where we can rapidly connect those whom
18 we serve with those who can best serve them.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Okay, I got
20 it. So, I mean I like to, you know, be—make it very
21 easy for people just to get information like I could
22 challenge everyone here that if you call my office
23 now any day from 9:00 to 5:00, the phone at my office
24 will get picked up before two rings. As long as you
25 all don't call at the same time, I guarantee it is

1
2 going to be picked up before two rings because I make
3 it very easy. I don't need people to call my office
4 and it should ring, three, four or five times and
5 then maybe go to a voice mail. The phone always gets
6 picked up. I never have in 4-1/2 years let the phone
7 ring more than twice when they called my office. You
8 could try it. Just give it some 9:00 to 5:00.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
10 Actually, don't even waste your time. I've tried it.
11 It's there.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So my--so my--

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Two
14 rings and your responsiveness as well Chair Deutsch.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So-so my--my point
16 is that I just want to like people that are watching
17 now or just betting the information out. So, I would
18 ask them call 311. If you know a veteran, right,
19 make sure you pick up the phone, call 311. You will
20 get to DVS.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yep.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We have many not-
23 for-profits who are ready and available to help.
24 Just make sure that you--you make the call. So, if
25 you know a vet, you know, make the--make the call.

1

2

Let's find out if someone may be eligible for the GI

3

Bill that may not know that he or she is not-not

4

eligible for it. Let's get everyone signed on.

5

Let's put this-let's put our-our country-let's make

6

sure that any and all resources gets put into our

7

veterans what-whichever way possible.

8

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Chair Deutsch,

9

thank you for your leadership absolutely. For any

10

veteran or family member out there who's just heard

11

your words, let me just double down on that. There

12

is no daylight. The people in this room demonstrate

13

the support that is out there across our great city.

14

You are not alone. We're here to have your back and

15

to get you on track and to learn from you and we're

16

all in this together. It's all about relationships.

17

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, I agree.

18

Okay, so, I'm going to call upon the former Chair of-

19

or actually I think you were-you used to be Chair of

20

the Veterans, right?

21

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Chair Eugene.

22

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, Chair Eugene.

23

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Good morning, sir.

24

COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you very

25

much. Good morning, Co-Chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair

1
2 and Commissioner thank you very much for your service
3 and, you know, you are doing dedication and passion.
4 So, you motivate me also to put more, you know,
5 motivation in what I'm doing and to all the veterans,
6 thank you also for your service. Thank you, and we
7 know that veterans when they go to serve they're
8 spending lot of time. It all depends as, you know,
9 many years, and when somebody--when they have to get
10 back to civilian life to regular life, some of it may
11 be difficult, the transition.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: To get back on
14 with your life. It's not easy. It's not easy for
15 many reasons that you know, and we know also that
16 you--you and the service are carry a lot of skill,
17 know, experience, and when they get--get back after
18 service is there any--any opportunity or support or
19 service to help them get credit for the skill or the
20 knowledge doing their care because some of them in a
21 different field demand so much and probably--I don't
22 know if that exists--some assistance or service or
23 program to help them transition, and get credit for
24 what they know already in order for them to pursue
25 their education.

1
2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. In
3 fact every institution here in this room and across
4 the city works--sits down with prospective student
5 veteran or family member and goes over the military
6 training and service record both the military
7 training that they may--they may have had that can be
8 then applied for college credit, as well as the
9 accredited college courses if they were industrious
10 if they were committed, if they really were serious
11 about their--their investment in their life of service
12 that they may have taken and passed during their time
13 in uniform. Those then are evaluated by the
14 institution to see which credits that then can be
15 applied towards a either 2-year or a 4-year or in
16 some cases a graduate degree.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: And thank you
18 very much, and one other thing that I have observed
19 personally, not only are the--not only for the
20 veterans but in general in the city of New York even
21 in the nation, we may have the best program, the best
22 services available for people, but the connection,
23 you know--

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes.
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COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: --that are connecting people in need who deserve the services to the services some it is not an easy task for many reasons because I have that several times. When they make the effort, you know, to do things, a lot of energy to our great program, but the outreach to those people some of the time is the best. But in terms of veteran, I believe that—I think that, you know, something, you know, you have that already what we have, you know, peer-to-peer--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: -veterans reaching veterans. So, my question is how many veterans you have working in the system to reach out to other veterans and to guide them in order for them to get not only the services available, but on time and to get ready—to-to great ready to take advantage to capitalize on the services that we have. Do we have veterans reaching veterans--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: --you know, and do we have to know for our veterans reaching out to veterans?

1
2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah, you've—you've
3 touched really Council Member Eugene on just the most
4 powerful bond I can point to. As Jonathan Shay once
5 put it, the veteran-to-veteran peer-to-peer bond is
6 as strong as the mother-infant bond. It's a survival
7 bond because in harm's way my survival depends on my
8 buddy having my back and that means my buddy has got
9 to know his or her job, and that point all
10 distinctions in terms of religion, geography, race,
11 ethnicity, you know, all of that fades away. It's
12 just a matter of can you do what you're trained to do
13 in a way that we will fulfill the mission, and we
14 will all get back hopefully with God's will back
15 alive. That doesn't always happen. We know that in
16 war good people die not what—no matter what our
17 leaders do. But we also know, for example here in
18 the city that this has been one of the factors for
19 example that has been so instrumental in explaining
20 out outsized impact with reducing veteran
21 homelessness. One of the things we did early on in
22 establishing DVS and even the year leading up to that
23 was to hire a team of veteran peer coordinators both
24 veterans, family members, folks who have walked the
25 walk, lived life and who can be there by the side

1
2 with homeless veterans and their loved ones and get
3 them into permanent housing. This thread, this peer-
4 to-peer bond threads through everything we do. It's
5 one of the reasons why that second pillar of our
6 Veterans Success Network, the Mentor a Vet program
7 with those 25 organizations that do mentoring for
8 veteran service members and their families, the only
9 reason we stood that up because it's such an
10 important bond, and so, when it comes to our student
11 veterans and their loved ones, and I think you'll see
12 this across the institutions here in the city it's
13 that-that-that veteran family member peer bond that
14 becomes the glue, the initial glue that really helps
15 guide, helps steer, help support and then, of course,
16 with that support veterans can really flourish and
17 totally and fully integrate within the larger
18 community, the larger society. So, absolutely that's
19 something that we'll continue to, you know,
20 throughout the—for example CUNY's system the Prove
21 Program that I mentioned earlier the project for
22 return and opportunity for veterans' education, they
23 really capitalize on this peer student model, and
24 it's something that I think we—you asked, you know,
25 is there enough? I think it's something we can

1
2 always build on, and the sooner we can link up
3 veterans to veterans' family members, peers to peers,
4 that really gives us the initial glue and the
5 foundation from which good things can happen and
6 communication efforts can really take root. I can
7 talk to a student veteran who, you know, may listen
8 to part of what I say, but it's not going to be
9 anything as effective as let's say if it's an
10 infantryman, a veteran who then has a fellow infantry
11 veteran and better yet if they're both Marines and
12 say hey buddy, you know, you're going down the wrong
13 alley. I tried that. I thought I knew everything
14 but I didn't, and if you do this, don't do what I
15 did. If you do this, it's going to work our better,
16 and the culture that we're then working inculcate
17 here in New York City is a culture where eventually—
18 yes, as Chair Deutsch and Chair Barron we talked
19 about the importance of competition. Sure,
20 competition. That's a great competition for talent,
21 but just as a good, a really great salesperson is not
22 content to just make a sale, a really great culture
23 here in New York City for our student veterans and GI
24 Bill users is not just content to get a student GI
25 Bill user in the classroom. It has to be the best

1
2 fit for that student GI Bill user, family member or
3 veteran, and so what I envision going forward is a
4 time when let's say a prospective student veteran
5 comes to oh, I don't know, I'm not going to name a
6 school. Let's say they go to one of our great
7 schools in New York City and say, you know, I'm
8 really interested in engineering and I'm—not just any
9 kind of engineering, but I want do bio engineering
10 and I envision a time when that institution could
11 say, well, you know, that's a great career field, but
12 you know, we've got other great programs, but if you
13 want to get really the best education in this career
14 field you might want to go talk to folks at another
15 institution here in our city. That's the kind of
16 culture that seeks to match strength to strength
17 institutions working together to help institutions
18 find the best fit for their strengths and needs, and
19 I think we're already well on that effort. When I
20 look out and I see the partnerships for example with
21 our two-year community colleges, which are such an
22 important step in the ladder to higher education, and
23 I see the partnership that really—really meshes with
24 their transition as they learn more and—and develop
25 and ago on that ladder, and hopefully do what—if

1
2 they're interested in adding graduate programs and
3 degrees to their preparation that's where we're
4 headed and I look forward to working with each of you
5 on that journey as we take that hill.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you very
7 much, Commissioner. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank
8 you.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you Council
11 Members.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, before I
13 go to my co-chair I just want to ask you two other
14 things. So, firstly if we could get that information
15 of how many inquiries come into Vet Connect, and I
16 will--and what categories--

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --and also I want
19 to see with 311 how many inquiries for veteran
20 services come through 311 to see if we need--first of
21 all, we have to make sure that when we do call 311,
22 that the person who answers--

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --understands and
doesn't ask like 150 questions before they connect
you, but once you mention veteran, they--they know--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --okay, we're going
to transfer you--the information over to DVS. Now how
does that information get to you from 311? Do you
have a screen at DVS that information comes in? How
does it--how does it get into you?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, so that
information is--it it's during business hours, 311 will
actually connect the individuals with our front desk
at the DVS Hub here on One Center Street.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And that's 212-412?
Is that the number you gave?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: 212-416--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 416. Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: 5250. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And that's always
answered--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And it--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --during business
hours? Not the phone?

1

2

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Our aim is-is to
3 have that answered. I-I haven't reached your
4 standards yet of two rings, Chair Deutsch--

5

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

6

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --but yes.

7

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, 311 will call
8 the 212-416-5250 number?

9

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

10

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay

11

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Or--yes and then an
12 email is also sent to the DVS staff from 311 with
13 information on the request so that we can log it into
14 our CRN system--

15

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

16

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --and then track
17 and make sure that we have followed up and-

18

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So,
19 who in your--so--so someone in your staff gets that
20 email?

21

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

22

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you have one
23 person assigned to the 311 inquiries?

24

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We have redundancy.

25

So, we make sure that the--that we have a new Director

1
2 of Constituent Services, Latisha Rassaw. Some of you
3 know her. She's been with us for many years--

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --but she directs
6 our coordination team and so we make sure that
7 multiple eyes are on that message stream--

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --so, it doesn't
10 fall through the cracks.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so if you
12 could--if you could just--let's--if you could get back
13 with numbers of how many inquiries--

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Sure.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --and also if we
16 could see if it goes by categories like for what--what
17 issues were called in for it. I mean could we--they
18 just send it over to DVS and then maybe when you put
19 in that information then you probably separate that,
20 right?

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We'll--we'll send
24 that out to you.

1
2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, I just want to
3 acknowledge we're joined here by Majority Leader and
4 superstar Laurie Cumbo.

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Terrific.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: She may deny it but
7 she had a Sabbath meal at my house Friday night, this
8 past Friday. She with her little one, Prince. She
9 asked me what—that gefilte fish? [laughs] So, I'm—
10 I'm going to ask my—my co-Chair because she had two
11 questions.

12 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. For—the
13 for-profit institutions are governed by a federal
14 provision that's called the 90/10 Rule and that
15 mandates that for-profit colleges cannot receive more
16 than 90% of their revenue from federal student aid
17 from the Department of Education. However, funds
18 from the VA do not count in the 90% category, and
19 that means that in theory if a for-profit receives
20 the full 90% from the Department of Education and the
21 remaining 10% from the VA, it could operate entirely
22 on federal money. In fact, a 2004 Senate Committee
23 Report revealed that 8 of the top 10 institutions
24 receiving GI Bill dollars, \$2.9 billion, were for-
25 profit schools including a few that operated in New

1
2 York City. So, my questions does the DVS track
3 students who have enrolled in for-profit
4 institutions?

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We work with a
6 number of for-profit institutions here in New York
7 City. We are not a regulatory agency so we don't,
8 you know, investigate schools. That's the role of
9 DCA. The loophole that you identify, however, is one
10 that's been identified by a number of our both city
11 as well as state and national service providers and
12 advocacy organizations because this is part of what
13 has led to-

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Uh-hm.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --the specter of
16 disproportionately the bad actors in this space have
17 come from for-profit institutions. Now, let me be
18 very clear, and this is national data now, the
19 majority of for-profit institutions are not bad
20 actors, but of those who are bad actors, the vast
21 majority of them are. Many of them take advantage of
22 this loophole, which then leads them down a path all
23 too often of doing things like underinvesting in
24 curriculum, underinvesting in teaching,
25 underinvesting in career counseling and in the kind

1
2 of guidance and support that students need to
3 succeed. And so I think it's an area that we need as
4 a city we need to look at very carefully and
5 determine whether as in the case of the BAH issue,
6 which as a city our elected led by the mayor and
7 others including Congressman Donovan, and members of
8 our City Council sent a letter to the federal
9 government and demanded that that issue be relooked.
10 We didn't get the total response we wanted. I think
11 we go a 4.5, 5% increase. This is the Staten Island
12 Discrepancy and Disparity and BAH funding, but I
13 think this is an issue where we could have a very
14 constructive voice and we could call out this
15 particular practice, which not only disadvantages, in
16 fact, much of the time even cripples student veterans
17 and their loved ones, but also veterans from across
18 the country whether or not they've served in uniform.
19 It's just simply wrong to go into debt to have been
20 made career promises for a career that doesn't exist
21 to have a worthless piece of paper to put on the wall
22 and to be crippled with debt and hopeless about what
23 your prospects are to redress or to seek—to seek a
24 solution that will make you whole.

25 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I couldn't agree
more. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you and just
one final point. If you could give me further
information, you can send it to me because the time
is moving on--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Sure,
sure.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: --about the source
of funding for the Yellow Ribbon Funds, for the
Yellow Ribbon Program. Is it through college grants?
It is a loan? So, if you could give me further
information.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We'll put together--
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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Thank
you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --a summary on
that.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you--

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you, Mr.
Chair.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --so much so much
Chair Barron.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, I
think we're going to go to our panel. I want to--
Commissioner, I want to thank you. Thank very much--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Thank
you Chair Deutsch.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --and wish you a
Merry Christmas, a happy and healthy New Year, and
Cassandra, thank you--

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: [interposing] Thank
you, Chair Deutsch--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --for testifying.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And the same to
you. Thank you, Chair Barron.

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Happy Holidays.

[background comments/pause]

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, we're
going to go to our panel. I'd like to first call up
Christopher Rosa, Vice Chancellor for Student
Affairs, CUNY; Lisa Beatha. [background comments]
and Leora Shudofsky. [pause] Before--before you begin,
I'd like to ask counsel to swear you in.

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LEGAL COUNSEL: Would you please raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee, and to respond honestly to Council Members questions?

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PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] I do.

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LEGAL COUNSEL: Please state your names for the record. [pause]

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CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Thank you. Thanks, Chair. Christopher Rose, Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at CUNY.

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LISA BEATHA: Lisa Beatha, University Director of Veteran Affairs, CUNY.

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Leora Shudofsky, Co-Director for PROVE, Project for Return and Opportunity in Veterans Education.

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CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Thank you and thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. Chair Barron, Chair Deutsch and Majority Leader Cumbo thank you again for having us all here today. I'd like to begin my testimony today by sincerely thanking you for your ongoing support of the City University of New York and for your enduring commitment to our returning veterans. My name is

1
2 Chris Rosa and I proudly serve as CUNY's Interim Vice
3 Chancellor for Student Affairs. I'm honored to serve
4 on this afternoon's panel with two of CUNY's
5 outstanding and most remarkable leaders in promoting
6 the success and wellness of CUNY student veterans.
7 Lisa Beatha, CUNY's dedicated Director of Veterans
8 Affairs and Leora Shudofsky, the Co-Director of the
9 Project for Return and Opportunity in Veterans'
10 Education, Project PROVE at CUNY's Silberman School
11 of Social Work. Together we will describe the depth
12 of CUNY's commitment to student veterans as well as
13 share some of the challenges we face in meeting the
14 unique needs of student veterans to ensure their
15 success. CUNY is deeply committed to making our
16 university a first choice destination for veterans.
17 As the nation's leading public urban university and
18 because of our legacy of providing higher education
19 opportunity for generations of those returning from
20 military service, we believe it is our duty to open
21 our doors wide to today's student veterans.
22 Moreover, as CUNY seeks to attract New York's top
23 students, it is in our interest to be attractive for
24 veterans. Veterans typically offer a profile that
25 his highly desirable by colleges and universities.

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2 They are mature, goal oriented, mission driven
3 experienced leaders who work tirelessly to achieve
4 their objectives and look for ways to make meaningful
5 contribution to their communities. They not only
6 understand the concept, the sacrifice for the greater
7 good, they've lived it. In short, veterans are
8 exactly the kind of students and role models we
9 welcome on our campuses. CUNY proudly educates more
10 than 3,300 student veterans, an increase of close to
11 300% over the last decade. In ways different from
12 previous veteran cohorts, today's student veterans at
13 CUNY reflect new realities of the military
14 engagements in which they've served. Indeed a third
15 of that trend is deployed in operations and during
16 Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn were deployed
17 multiple times. When it comes to college costs, CUNY
18 remains by far New York City's most affordable option
19 for veterans. Student veterans who are eligible for
20 the Post-9/11 GI Bill at 100% and those who are
21 residents of New York State can attend CUNY at no
22 cost. Furthermore, veterans who are not New York
23 State residents are charged the same tuition rate as
24 New York State residents for a period of 18 months
25 from their first date of attendance. Finally,

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2 veterans are exempt from the CUNY admission
3 application fee. Indeed, CUNY issues more than 1,000
4 veteran undergraduate application fee waivers to
5 veterans from all branches of the armed forces
6 including Reservists and National Guard members which
7 equates to almost 80,000 in waivers per year.
8 \$80,000. CUNY understands the transition from
9 military life to higher education, and has put in
10 place services to ease this transition. In 2013,
11 CUNY issued the report of the Council of Presidents
12 Ad Hoc Committee on strengthening services to
13 veterans from soldier to scholar to address the needs
14 of student veterans, to examine our practices and
15 develop recommendations to improve the experience of
16 student veterans at CUNY. This report provided
17 several recommendations that have guided our
18 university to better support student veterans from
19 recruitment and admission through graduation and
20 ultimately to transition to employment. Once
21 enrolled, CUNY student veterans have access to
22 services and programming designed to provide a
23 supportive environment and a successful academic
24 experience. Some veterans returning from military
25 service can face emotional, financial, academic and

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cultural obstacles to college transition. To meet the unique needs of returning veterans, most of our campuses have full-time veteran services coordinators and these coordinators serve as one-stop resource for student veterans. Most of our campuses also have established dedicated co-curricular spaces for student veterans. To build our capacity to welcome veterans and support their success, many CUNY faculty and staff members receive military cultural competence training. Several of our colleges have across departmental working veterans services teams comprised of key offices that impact the student veteran experience, including academic advisement, the certifying official, disability services, the Bursar, Financial Aid, Registrar, the Counseling Center and the Career Services Center. We are also very fortunate to have the Project for Return and Opportunity in Veterans' Education, Project PROVE, currently on many of our CUNY campuses. PROVE assists student veterans in their transition from military life to college and civilian life. Teams of student veteran mentors, graduate social work interns and social work field instructors work with campus professionals to enrich existing services to veterans

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2 and my colleague Leora will speak more richly to
3 Project PROVE and its impact. Many soldiers,
4 Marines, Airmen and sailors join the military before
5 their 21st birthday, and for many it's the only job
6 they've ever held. While this training and
7 experience are certainly invaluable, it's not always
8 intuitively translatable to civilian employment. In
9 addition, many returning veterans face structural
10 barriers to employment causing veterans to struggle
11 in their transition to the civilian workforce. CUNY
12 is committed to helping student veterans successfully
13 transition to the civilian workforce. Career
14 readiness, internships and post-graduate employment
15 for student veterans are top priorities for our
16 university. CUNY partners with both the public and
17 private sectors to cultivate opportunities for
18 student veterans. We connect our student veterans to
19 valued organizational partners that through mentoring
20 programs and career counseling help prepare student
21 veterans for the world of work. America corporate
22 partners connects veterans to business leaders
23 through mentorship and online career advice. Edge
24 for Vets assists veterans with transitioning their
25 military service into resiliency tools for success,

1
2 and FourBlock assists veterans in bridging the gap
3 from academics to career development. In closing,
4 I'm very pleased to report that 2017 and 2018, the
5 College of Staten Island was named the top military
6 friendly-military friendly large school in America in
7 recognition of its programs for veterans, members of
8 the armed forces leaving military service and their
9 military spouses by Victory Media. Again, we thank
10 you for this opportunity, and I'm pleased to turn to
11 my colleague Lisa Beatha.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

13 CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Thank you.

14 LISA BEATHA: Good morning, Chairs Barron
15 and Deutsch and member of the Higher Ed-Education and
16 Veterans committees. My name is Lisa Beatha, and I
17 am the University Director of Veterans Affairs for
18 CUNY. I'm a proud veteran and graduate as well as
19 CUNY, from CUNY. I'm grateful to have this
20 opportunity to speak to you today about the
21 initiatives and programs as well as our services here
22 at CUNY. As a veteran of the U.S. Army, I take
23 special interest in ensuring that our veterans, our
24 reservists, our active duty and even spouses and
25 dependents reach their career, academic and personal

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2 goals. In 2002, CUNY had only 1,200 student
3 veterans. Today, we have almost tripled that amount
4 with over 3,300 veterans. All of our undergraduate
5 campuses have hired staff to make sure that we—to
6 ensure that we support this record enrollment of our
7 student veterans across our CUNY system, which is
8 within our city's five boroughs. Almost one-quarter
9 of our veteran student population are women. Almost
10 three-quarters of our student veterans are Black,
11 Hispanic or Asian much like the rest of our CUNY
12 population. In 2011, to ensure that CUNY was
13 responsive to the needs of our veteran population,
14 CUNY convened a CUNY Task Force just on veterans
15 spearheaded by several college presidents with a
16 mandate to customize an approach to veterans'
17 education. The Veterans Task Force yielded 38
18 specific CUNY wide recommendations in the following
19 areas: Accelerating veterans' access to financial
20 aid benefits; creating a point of contact for each
21 campus beyond VA benefits; Offering expanded
22 counseling services and advisement via Project PROVE;
23 facilitating credit transfer; initiating
24 opportunities to engage with public and private
25 sector internship networks; and career opportunities.

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2 I am pleased to say that we may—we have made a great
3 deal of progress in all areas. Since 2013, our
4 student veteran clubs have tripled from 5 SVA, that's
5 Student Veterans of America Chapters to 15, and since
6 2014, the university has updated its military policy
7 to ensure that our student veterans can register and
8 enroll in desired classes, and process their GI Bill
9 claims without weight, without excessive delays.
10 Some of our initiatives—sorry. Some of our
11 initiatives include: Raising the admission fee as
12 stated earlier, as well as ensuring that eligible
13 family members who do qualify for post-9/11 benefits
14 do receive payments. Our central Office of VA—of
15 Veteran Affairs is also responsible for coordinating
16 outreach, retention program services as well as
17 ensuring that we have outreach to our students via
18 social media where we have created a newsletter, a
19 website that highlights our initiatives as well as
20 our military and veteran policies. Our office also
21 hired student veterans through the VA program, and we
22 have also ensure that our—we have platforms for
23 outreach as mentioned as Twitter, Instagram, Linked-
24 In as well as we profile our students, veterans via a
25 profile called Veterans of CUNY similar to Humans of

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2 New York. CUNY has also established a CUNY wide
3 Council of Veteran Affairs in which we regularly meet
4 two to three times a semester and some our veteran
5 directors are here throughout our campuses. At least
6 of our 25 veteran directors meet regularly. We also
7 discussed federal and city policies as well as the-
8 bringing resources from New York City to support our
9 veterans. We also have a close working relationship
10 with the Department of Veterans Services, and other
11 city agencies. Since 2014, we have held an annual
12 awards breakfast just for our CUNY veterans with
13 honors. Geared specifically for current students who
14 have achieved academic excellence and have a 3.5 GPA
15 with 30 credits or more at the community level or 60
16 credits or more at the senior college level. We also
17 host an annual professional development resource fair
18 just for our students, and as well as for our faculty
19 to learn more about military cultural competency.
20 Part of this fair is also to encourage out veterans
21 to also know more about our CUNY programs graduate
22 programs as well as resources within New York City.
23 Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of
24 CUNY.

25 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

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2 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Good afternoon members
3 of the City Council's Veterans Committee and Higher
4 Education Committee. Thank you for inviting me to
5 testify. My name is Leora Shudofsky. I'm a social
6 worker, a proud graduate of Queens College and Hunter
7 College School of Social Work now Silberman, and I am
8 currently the co-director of PROVE, Project for
9 Return and Opportunity in Veterans' Education at
10 Silberman's School of Social work, and I've been part
11 of this initiative since 2008. My Co-Director Dr.
12 Roger Sherwood is a Vietnam Era Veteran and has
13 worked with the veteran community in New York City
14 for over 30 years. In fact, from 1986 to 2016, he
15 was the Clinical Consultant tot the Veterans
16 Administration Hudson Valley Healthcare System
17 Montrose Campus where he counseled veterans with
18 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In 2007, in response
19 to the Record number of veterans returning home and
20 enrolling in higher education, an initiative was
21 lost-launched from the CUNY Offices of Veterans
22 Affairs and Enrollment Management. That initiative
23 allowed Dr. Sherwood and then University Dean of
24 Enrollment Management Robert Tachek (sp?) a fellow
25 veteran and a long-time veteran advocate to establish

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PROVE whose mission is to enhance existing services to student veterans on numerous CUNY campuses and support them in their transition from military service to college life and beyond PROVE accomplishes that through an innovative service delivery model utilizing graduate student, social work interns and experienced social work field instructors in conjunction with student veteran peer mentors and/or VA work study, students on these host campuses to assist the veterans in their transition academically, socially and emotionally, and there's an attached diagram at the end of my testimony that visually shows you that. We are also pleased to have added training the next generation of social workers to be culturally competent in serving those who serve as part of our mission statement. Through this cultural competency training, we are to provide student veterans with access to information both on and off campuses about services such as legal, medical, counseling, housing, et cetera. PROVE stated at just two CUNY college campuses Hunter College and John Jay College with two social work graduate interns placed at each—and a placement at the then Mason CUNY Office of Veteran Affairs under the supervision of Wilfred

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Cotto, who I think is here. That office's first director who started with a close collaboration with COVA that continues through today. Two years ago when I last testified before this joint committee, we were going through, as a program, a contraction due to budget cuts and reduced our services down to only four campuses. Thanks to money allocated by the City Council Veterans Committee to CUNY in Fiscal Year 18 and 19, we have been able to build our program back up and are now serving more campuses than we had at our previous peak in 2015-16. We are very grateful for this support as we know the value of our model matches up with the needs of student veterans at CUNY especially during this time of waning public interest and dollars in the sphere. PROVE over the years has expanded to other CUNY community and senior colleges. We have a cohort currently of 19 graduate social work interns this year serving 9 campuses, and we will continue to be able to serve over 1,000 student veterans annually. Unique student veterans annually. In fact, in 2017-18 PROVE served 1,015 unique student veterans, and we are also able to report that persistence rate for PROVE served student veterans last year was 95.9%, while non-PROVE served student

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2 veterans' persistent was 76.6, which is still pretty
3 good. One of the most valuable pieces of our program
4 is utilizing the student veterans peer mentors both
5 paid and volunteer as well as our social workers
6 interns to help student veterans make critical social
7 connections with other veterans on their campus.
8 Their shared experiences and rekindling of a type of
9 comradery that they may have had in the military and
10 not since, is a powerful tool in helping them
11 transition from military life to college life and
12 beyond. In shaping the project service delivery
13 model, PROVE recognized that many veterans hesitate
14 to seek PROVE hesitate to seek formalized mental
15 health services. Veterans may also be wary of what
16 motivates civilians to offer their help. On the
17 other hand, we have observed that veterans tend to
18 relax in the presence of other veterans, to more
19 readily share their life experiences and to be
20 inspired to help fellow veterans. As a result, PROVE
21 is co-located in campus student veteran resource
22 centers. Sharing the space gives us a greater chance
23 of success with fostering engagement with the student
24 veterans as well as for them to find the opportunity
25 to connect socially in the company of their peers.

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This trusting relationship both a platform for PROVE to provide concrete services to student veterans that aid in their educational success, such as helping them navigate their educational benefits or offering sometimes academic supports such as tutoring. Trust also allows us to offer emotional support and create linkages to other resources when necessary. We refer student veterans to professionals both on campus and in the community with whom we have developed relationships over the years, and can personally recommend wherever possible. To that end, part of our work to exist—I'm sorry—to enhance existing services on campuses to students, to student veterans relies on creating synergy around the various departments on campuses and the professionals to staff them such as Academic Advising Counseling, Accessibility and Disability Services, the Registrar and the Bursar's office. PROVE team develops relationships with the staff in these offices and the veteran knowledgeable points of contact to help to streamline administrative processes to serve the student veterans needs better and more effectively. In a fast paced academic setting we find that the safe (sic) space approach better serves the students

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2 that better who is likely to be busy or overwhelmed
3 and can benefit from short-term practical support
4 such as coping skills development and stress
5 reduction techniques. For student veterans with more
6 extensive needs, PROVE ensure that its team is
7 informed and placed to respond. We have a mandatory
8 biweekly special educational and military cultural
9 competency training for our intern cohort and our
10 social work field instructors. Both the literature
11 and anecdotal experience shows that there's a
12 continued stigma around seeking help and services for
13 most veterans. One of the reasons that the model
14 works is because it meets student veterans where they
15 are, at the campus, in the Student Veteran Resource
16 Center. Our student veterans have thrived and found
17 purpose in existing fellow veterans, a foundation of
18 the military culture, and thus they help themselves
19 in the process. Many of our graduate interns have
20 gone on to work with veterans either in their second
21 year internship and/or after graduation. More than
22 20% of our graduate interns since 2007-2008, now work
23 at the VA, CUNY and other veteran service
24 organizations. One of the most valuable pieces of
25 our program—I think I actually—I'm looking at my own

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2 thing and I turned it over. Sorry, the last page. I
3 apologize. As I mentioned before the public interest
4 and funding for organizations working with veterans
5 is on a downward turn. We need to be creative in
6 reshaping the veteran services at CUNY. The fact
7 that every CUNY campus has a staff person who is
8 dedicated in part or full-time to student veteran
9 services is a tremendous achievement, but we cannot
10 rest in that achievement alone, and we cannot afford
11 as a community and an institution of higher learning
12 to lessen our focus and services. In peace time,
13 CUNY as did many other academic institutions allowed
14 its services to veterans to shrink to almost nothing
15 because of the drop in number of identified student
16 veterans on campus. In 2009, CUNY experienced a 233%
17 jump in veterans enrollment due in large to the then
18 new Post 9/11 GI Bill, but also to the CUNY
19 leadership specifically COVA and the strong support
20 from Veterans of the CUNY Administration. Student
21 veteran enrollment at CUNY may be at its peak now on
22 the Post 9/11 Era. We may be seeing a plateau over
23 the next few years, but not a diminishment, and with
24 this time and experience behind us, we have a better
25 idea of what kind of services beyond academic student

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veterans need to be successful at all educational levels from the associate to the doctoral degree. I've been privileged over the last 10 plus years to work with veterans who have started at one of the CUNY Community colleges and have successfully completed masters in education, social work, business, nursing and more. Some of them are here in this room. I also know that some of these veterans look at their experiences on camps, and the communities and the resources that they found met their needs as a unique population invaluable in their success, and I thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much. We appreciate the panel coming and offering the testimony on behalf of CUNY, and we've got lots of questions for you as you can imagine. Can you tell us what is your relationship with DVS?

LISA BEATHA: Currently we work with DVS on the Veterans and Campus Initiative as well as any initiative for example the Rent, BAH issue came up, but we also have resource fairs where DVS has been instrumental in preparing to have services and have resource individuals there to speak with veterans.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Push the button for
him, pleas.

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CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.

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CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Thanks. Thank you,
and I would just add that we're grateful for DVS and
Commissioner Sutton and Cass to really help to
galvanize a citywide community around student
veterans and the professionals who serve them. I
think that we—we've always sort of informally relied
on that network, but the affirmation that we've
gotten has been a very powerful impetus for us to do
better and to share best practices.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, how does CUNY
identify veterans as they enroll? Is it self-
identifying? Is it part of the application process?
How do we—how does CUNY know—

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LISA BEATHA: [interposing] We--

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: --when veterans are
enrolled.

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LISA BEATHA: Sorry. We know primarily
by self-identification that we take it another step
further. Once their benefits are cleared, once they
have established through the VA a Certificate of

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2 Eligibility, we know that this is a veteran because,
3 of course, we don't just code them. We know through
4 VA payments, et cetera that this is a veteran.

5 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And do we have the
6 information regarding veterans that we can
7 disaggregate? You know, I always like to have the
8 particulars? Do we have that information? Could you
9 share that with us?

10 CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Absolutely.

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, and we want it,
12 of course. Do you find that there's a concentration
13 of veterans in a particular service area—in a
14 particular curriculum area?

15 LISA BEATHA: [off mic] There is.
16 Where's my sheet. We have veterans that primarily at
17 one point would major in Criminal Justice. We're
18 also noticing a rise in STEM majors. That's a big
19 trend that we're also noticing with our veterans, but
20 it's all across the board in the various majors, but
21 I would say the top 10 would be within the Liberal
22 Arts, STEM and possibly Criminal Justice.

23 CHRISTOPHER ROSA: As well as Business
24 and Finance.

25 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Say again.

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CHRISTOPHER ROSA: I'm sorry. Business
and Finance as well.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Business and
Finance. Okay, and we noticed that PROVE is at--what
is it? Nine campuses?

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Uh-hm.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: How are those--how
are those campuses select to be locations for PROVE
is it by?

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: I guess--I guess I will
answer that one. Some of them are historically as
John Jay and Hunter from the very beginning. The
program was established with those campuses and for
the other campuses, over years it's both to do with
population and size. So the very, very large
campuses. That would include BMCC, John Jay and
Kingsborough actually as--as kind of the--the large--on
the large side for CUNY campuses in terms of student
veterans, but even the smaller campuses such as
Medgar Evers, there is a desire to have additional
services that can enhance what already exists on
campus. If we have the right mix of interns and a
good supervisor, then we can have a site there. So,
some of this depends on our resources from year-to-

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year in terms of recruiting social worker students

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from-from the School of Social Work, and a lot of

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times it depends on the campus' willingness to-to

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host our program and to allow our interns to grow in

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the first semester in their training so that they are

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genuinely contributing members by-by Mid-Fall

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Semester.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And does each

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location have the same level of services?

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: From PROVE?

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Is the staffing from

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PROVE? Yes, from PROVE?

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Yes. Uh-hm.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, wherever you

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would go you see the same?

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Yes.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

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COMMISSIONER SUTTON: But I want to be

20

very specific for-for PROVE. Not every campus--

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: For PROVE, yes.

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Every campus' structure

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that is what the unique about CUNY--

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's okay.

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: --ever campus is just structured at how they--they set up the veterans services differently. So, even the title of the--the person who is the TAP supervisor is going to be different from campus to campus, but two interns and a field instructor come with every--everything.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And so how does CUNY engage the student who's a veteran in the issues and concerns that are at the community, at the campus. How did--did you do a particular outreach to involve--to have them involved in that?

LISA BEATHA: That's why we have every campus having a campus coordinator. They can make direct outreach to our students. It varies according to what the issues may or may not be.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, and so CUNY is a signatory on the VA's Principles of Excellence Program, which established the eight guidelines. What progress has CUNY made in terms of following through on these principles?

LISA BEATHA: The principles of excellence they follow through with what the president's task force recommends as well. So, I would say we've made great progress with that.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And does the task
force continue to meet?

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LISA BEATHA: Unfortunately no. The-
everyone knows that we are currently in a-we have an
interim chancellor. So, that's one of the reasons.
That's the main reason.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So, when is the
breaking news about the selection of [laughter]
Chancellor that we have?

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LISA BEATHA: I wouldn't know.

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LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Didn't you have
something to say about that?

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: No, I don't.
[laughs] Okay, I'm gong-I'm going to turn it over
to-to the Co-Chair.

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LISA BEATHA: [off mic] I heard about
the Chancellor.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [laughs]

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. In
celebration of my first hearing with the chair, with
Chair Barron, I'm going to do something a little
different. I'm going to take three questions from-
two questions from advocates for CUNY. So, as soon
as I get them, I will ask them. So, first, I want to

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1
2 ask Chris, how is--how is CUNY dealing with delays of
3 the GI benefits.

4 CHRISTOPHER ROSA: I'm going to defer to
5 my colleague Lisa Beatha who works in more
6 granularity with those issues than I do. Lisa.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

8 LISA BEATHA: So, I'm with the NAVPA
9 Board, which is the National Association of Veteran
10 Program Administrators. Since August I was told with
11 the GI Bill there might be delays. So, I formally
12 reached out to the university bursar at CUNY to
13 ensure that none of our students have issues about
14 registering for the spring of 2019 or any delays in
15 their fall registration. So this is ongoing where
16 we're ensuring that there are no academic enrollment
17 issues for our veterans.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So that would be a
19 case that you would tell a student I'm sorry, we
20 can't take you. We haven't received any--any of this?

21 LISA BEATHA: No.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So--so--

23 LISA BEATHA: Once they're enrolled
24 they're fine.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, once they're enrolled they're okay, and let's say they're not enrolled and they're coming in.

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LISA BEATHA: Again the benefits do not pay out automatically so they can enroll. We do not delay enrollment for finances.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, enrollment as that-that-the veteran will enroll and actually attend the classes.

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LISA BEATHA: And attend yes.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So-so there's not-- there won't be any delay--

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LISA BEATHA: No.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --for anyone to come in. That's good to hear. Thank you for that. Also, do you oversee all 25 campuses? So, like every campus has another veteran liaison.

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LISA BEATHA: Almost-almost every campus.

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Again, our 18-I would say 18, 19 campuses are combined senior and community campuses. However, our professional schools do not have a high volume of veterans. So, therefore, there is a contact person, but not as formal as the undergraduate portions.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Uh-hm. Okay, this is from Fuliara (sp?) What is it like the two top challenges that—if you could keep it brief, the two top challenges that they see the veterans have?

LEORA SHUDOFISKY: For Student veterans?

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes.

LEORA SHUDOFISKY: I think establishing community because sometime they can feel walking around a campus that they don't have any other people around that are like them, and so establishing community is one, and I think just getting used to the way that the colleges disseminate information and—and the rhythm that—that they expect students to respond in terms of registration and things like that, which is a little bit different from how people experience like in the military in terms of—of delivery of information so that that couple of months of transition can be a rough one kind of bridging the gap between what it is that they know from before, and what it is they they're getting to know.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, obviously you don't—you don't give all services to veterans.

LEORA SHUDOFISKY: No.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, what would happen when you reach out for a veteran or a veteran reaches out to you and the services that you do not provide, what do you do with the information?

LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Right. So, we actually have a really good referral network, which we've developed over the years, and not that Vet Connect is up and running and--and relaunched, a lot of our interns are getting trained on that because I think that that's a really good resource, but between the Vet Center of the VA and other veteran service organizations around the city, we've been around for 12 years now, and we've developed these relationships with warm hand-offs to different agencies. So, something that we feel is not appropriate for either and intern to handle or for something on--on the campus to be handled, we have this network in all the boroughs where we are.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, when you connect a veteran to Vet Connect--

LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --you just, you give them the website or you hold that vet's hand and --

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LEORA SHUDOFASKY: [interposing] In my—in my experience, NYC Serves before Vet Connect, we actually sat with the veteran. The veteran has to be the one that goes into the system--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

LEORA SHUDOFASKY: --but in an effort to be able to give that information to the next veteran that comes along, an intern will sit and say hey can I—can I just be with you while you're doing this so I can see what it entails? Then we get the live information because we can't actually go into the system and—and do that. The veteran has to do that.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Alright, I'm going to ask the two questions that I got. I'm not going to vet them. [laughter] Okay, question number one.

LEORA SHUDOFASKY: Well, let it come.

(sic)

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [laughs] I won't vet that. How many veterans are enrolled at CUNY and not receiving Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, and what support are offered?

LISA BEATHA: Any veteran that does not receive the GI Bill, we do have an Office of Student

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2 Financial AID. So, there is a way for them to get
3 support that way if it's financial support. If it's
4 support in general, there is again any director on
5 the campus that is the veteran coordinator or veteran
6 director, they can assist that veteran. It's not
7 exclusive to the someone receiving benefits. They—as
8 long as they identify as a veteran's spouse or
9 dependent, they will receive any type of assistance
10 they need.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, what
12 experience--from you experience what type of benefits
13 did they receive if they're not part of the GI Bill?

14 LISA BEATHA: If they receive—if-it
15 depends on their financial score. There's a code in
16 within FASFA (sic). If they reach 100% eligibility
17 then it's TAP and PELL. If not, it might just be
18 TAP. It might just be PELL or they may be eligible
19 for a Perkins Loan, which is a lower interest loan.
20 So, it may vary, but it's nothing veteran related
21 that they'll receive.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is this something
23 you're doing, though? (sic)

24 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Well, except for the
25 fact that tuition deferral and—and registration is

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2 not dependent on them using particular benefits. In
3 other words, it identifies the veteran and they're
4 coded as a veteran, they have the tuition deferral.
5 That's someone that's using the GI Bill as well. So,
6 that CUNY does not discriminate, you know, if you're
7 not using your GI Bill that particular year. There
8 are people that are saving their GI Bill for-for
9 graduate school or some people that are not getting
10 100% and they have maxed out. So, the services that--
11 that CUNY offers are not dependent on whether or not
12 they're using the GI Bill. It's just--it happens to
13 code you one way or another if you are.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, if-if, again,
15 if a veteran doesn't--is not--doesn't have a GI Bill
16 and--

17 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Right.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --and on the
19 application they fill out is there any questions
20 about veterans--

21 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --like if they're
23 parents of a veteran--

24 LEORA SHUDOFSKY: Uh-hm.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --is-is that part
of the questionnaire?

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LISA BEATHA: On the admissions
application, it's there. So they can indicate that
they're a veteran or if they're a walk-in, which is
considered a direct admit-

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

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LISA BEATHA: --they can state that
they're a veteran, and they get that.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So,
in other words, like someone fills out and the
veteran and he or she may say, I'm not-I'm not part
of the GI Bill, but then would a question be asked or
is it on the application saying maybe they could get
a-you know, the GI Bill transferred over to them from
a family member.

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LISA BEATHA: It doesn't work that way.
It's either they are or they aren't. So, either way
and someone that's assisting them whether it's an
admissions or a veteran coordinator can assist them
in receiving whatever benefits they qualify for.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, if a veteran
doesn't know that-that he or she is on a-on the GI
Bill, if they're unsure or they don't know, maybe

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2 they--maybe they might be eligible. So dose someone
3 look into that?

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LISA BEATHA: Yes, that's what the
5 veteran coordinators are there for--

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So,
7 that's a--

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LISA BEATHA: --and even if they don't
9 qualify, the veteran coordinator can assist them with
10 a financial aid coordinator to help them find a way
11 to pay the bill--

12

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

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LISA BEATHA: --without worrying about
14 enrollment.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Question
16 number 2: Please give us an update on what happened
17 at La Guardia Community College from the last hearing
18 two years ago. [background comments]

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CHRISTOPHER ROSA: So, at LaGuardia
20 Community College, there were some students and
21 alumni who complained about harassment and
22 discrimination based on veteran status, and pursuant
23 to our approach to investigating those complaints,
24 the college's Chief Diversity Officer conducted an
25 investigation, an while those concerns were not

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substantiated, it revealed that there's a lot of opportunity for improvement, and so we've been working with the college. They've restructured their Veteran Services Office to make it more responsive to the needs and—and concerns of student veterans. There's been a real vibrance that's been added through PROVE, which is very strong. It has a very strong presence now on that campus, and they've launched a Vibrant Veterans student organization all of which means we're in the right direction. Enrollment is admittedly a little down on that campus, but we have sort a strategic approach to work at regaining the—the confidence of veterans in La Guardia, and we're optimistic that—that we're beginning to—to move in the right direction.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. What is the average age of the veterans who come and participate in CUNY campus programs?

CHRISTOPHER ROSA: In terms of the age of student veterans, they're—they're on average older than traditional college students. In fact, only—only 24% of student veterans are age 18 to 24. 76%

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2 are 25 or older, and with 68% of them in the age
3 range of 25 to 44 years of age.

4 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And we know that
5 there is only 36 months of GI Bills that they are
6 eligible for. How do—do we know how that impacts
7 with their attainment of a degree? Do we know
8 whether or not there are students who don't get that
9 degree because their benefits are exhausted?

10 LISA BEATHA: I can't say specifics about
11 numbers of students that have not been able to get a
12 degree. Again, one thing about CUNY we are the most
13 affordable.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes.

15 LISA BEATHA: So, the GI Bill is—

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: But you know my
17 position is that CUNY should be tuition free.

18 CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Sure

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I'll—I want to get
20 that on the record.

21 LISA BEATHA: That's true.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

23 LISA BEATHA: But [laughter] back to
24 veterans, the issue of 36 months doesn't usually
25 impact them in a financial way as far as tuition

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2 because of the TAP and PELL benefits that cover
3 tuition. The only issue is housing allowance. Once
4 that's gone, then it makes it more difficult.

5 CHRISTOPHER ROSA: And—and as an
6 indicator to underscore Lisa's point, if we look at
7 the 3-year graduation rates of associate degree
8 students, this presumably a 36-month period.

9 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Right. Our veterans
10 actually out-perform the general student population
11 in terms of graduation rates, graduating at 24%
12 versus the general rate of 19%. So, that's a good
13 sign that at least they don't seem to be dramatically
14 unduly impacted by those—by those limitations.

15 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: In a part of the
16 data that we have for veterans and military
17 enrollment, at the senior colleges it's a total of
18 both full and part-time of 1,726 and at the Community
19 colleges a total of 1,333. When we look at the
20 graduate level, it's on 292 for senior colleges, and
21 I don't see anything. Well, 292 at the senior
22 colleges. So, that's a dramatic difference. Do we
23 have any idea—I heard someone reference the fact that
24 sometimes veterans will use their other—will use
25 other sources to pay, and reserve the GI Bill

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2 benefits for graduate school. Do we have any
3 indication of how frequently that's done?

4 LISA BEATHA: We have not been able to
5 track that information but what I have been doing is
6 making outreach to the veteran coordinators and
7 student to at least have the opportunity to find out
8 more about our veteran programs for veterans and
9 spouses and dependents, and when I say programs,
10 graduate programs. I believe, and this is just
11 anecdotally that a lot of our veterans assume that
12 CUNY doesn't have certain graduate programs or it
13 might be that they have to take care of their
14 families, but we're trying to get the word out more
15 about our graduate programs.

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So, is that
17 something that PROVE or the--the veterans personnel
18 on--on campus can do to be more aggressive in getting
19 that information out so that they are aware of the
20 graduate programs that are out there?

21 LISA BEATHA: That's part of it, but I am
22 also hosing now twice a year a professional
23 development where CUNY has a special breakout woman
24 (sic). That's why I had those maps too so that
25 veterans and their spouses or dependents can be aware

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2 of what CUNY has to offer on the undergraduate to
3 doctoral level.

4 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Now, we know that
5 Pathways is supposed to facilitate students moving
6 from campus to campus, but not all classes are a part
7 of the Pathways Program. Is there any effort to give
8 special consideration to veterans who are
9 transferring from one campus to another whose class
10 credits may not fall within what some of the—within
11 the purview of Pathways?

12 LISA BEATHA: It shouldn't be any
13 different for veterans. We—what we try to establish
14 because we have a smaller population than the quarter
15 of a million plus CUNY students. We try to pick up
16 the phone and speak to that new campus that the
17 veteran is going to, and make sure our veterans start
18 preparing to transfer before they physically get on a
19 campus so that they're aware of any nuances, but
20 those issues don't usually come up in large numbers.

21 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And a question that
22 had been presented before was about interruption in
23 continuity of taking classes. What happens if
24 reservists is called up and it's mid-semester and
25 there's a break in—in their classes?

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LISA BEATHA: CUNY just updated—well, not just. It's almost three years now that CUNY updated the Military Policy. So, no veteran that is called up should owe a bill or have issues about disruption. The only issue that may come up if it goes beyond a certain number of years, then you may have issues there, but in general no. We—CUNY has already established that any veteran that's activated, reservists and so forth can have bill cleared. They're not responsible depending upon what time they were activated or called up for duty, and they are also ensured to come back, and the campuses work with them with their academic program. [pause]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, thank you so much. We do appreciate your coming and offering the testimony that you have, and we look forward to getting the answers that we posed that you'll send to us. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Thank you, Chair Barron.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, and we hope you come back.

CHRISTOPHER ROSA: Well, thank you.

[background comments/pause]

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Our next panel
Joseph Berkman Brie. Joseph Berkman Breen, Angel
Vasquez, Peter Awn. We have another hearing coming
up in this room pretty shortly. So, we're going to
put everyone on 3-minute clock, and I really want to
thank you for—for coming down here today to testify.
[pause] Okay, we'll go clockwise. You may begin.

JOSEPH BERKMAN BREEN: Chair Deutsch,
Chair Barron, Council Members and staff, good morning
and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the
Committee on Veterans and Committee on Higher
Education regarding veteran's access to higher
education in New York City. My name is Joseph
Berkman Breen and I am a legal fellow in the Special
Litigation Unit at the New York Legal Assistance
Group, NYLAG. In this testimony I will discuss some
of the specific challenges our clients face and the
risks of for-profit post-secondary education, and the
ways in which current oversight is failing to prevent
harm to student veterans. First, we see too many
student veterans attending high cost, low value
schools that lead them to exhaust their veteran's
education benefits and burden themselves with loans
that provide them little or no value in return.

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2 These high cost low value schools are often for-
3 profit schools, which charge significantly more than
4 public schools, spend significantly more on profit
5 and advertising than they do on instruction and have
6 on average the lowest graduation rates, lowest
7 employment rates, and higher loan default rates among
8 all post-secondary schools. In fact, students who
9 attend for-profit schools for associates or
10 bachelor's degrees experience on average declines in
11 their earnings and rates of employment compared to
12 before they enrolled in the for-profit school. Among
13 student veterans who for-profit schools in New York
14 City we see low graduation rates, wasted education
15 benefits, crippling debt burdens, and schools that do
16 not provide veterans with any addition skills or job
17 prospects. One of our veteran clients, Carter,
18 attended Sanford-Brown University, and that a fund
19 for profit school for a medical billing and coding
20 program. Attending Sanford-Brown was so costly that
21 Carter needed to take out loans in addition to
22 relying on his VA education benefits. Sanford-Brown
23 told Carter that if he graduated he was essentially
24 guaranteed to find a job in his chosen field and the
25 school would provide him lifetime career services

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2 support. As the New York Attorney General
3 documented, these promises were false. Carter
4 graduated with the highest grades of his class, and
5 applied to dozens of job, but he was unable to find
6 work in his field. The school did not help him at
7 all, and it closed less than two years after his
8 graduation leaving Carter with nothing but debt.
9 Carter exhausted his hard earned education benefits
10 attending a for-profit school that provided him no
11 value and he was unable to pay back his loans as a
12 result. He is now on the brink of default and has
13 left New York for a low-paying work in another state.
14 Another of our veteran clients, Anthony, was disabled
15 as a result of his military service and received an
16 honorable discharge. In search of greater career
17 opportunities in civilian life, Anthony enrolled in
18 an undergraduate degree program at DeVry University a
19 for-profit school in New York City. DeVry told
20 Anthony that his GI Bill education benefits would
21 cover the cost of attendance, but that he should also
22 sign up for what they called grants just in case.
23 Anthony—Anthony explicitly told DeVry that he did not
24 want [bell] to take out loans, but after graduation,
25 Anthony learned that he had been signed up for

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2 thousands of dollars of loans that he is now
3 financially unable to pay back. Carter and Anthony's
4 stories are classic examples of what our veteran
5 clients experience at for-profit schools across New
6 York City, and illustrate the ways for-profit schools
7 often engage in false advertising, deceptive
8 recruitment tactics and predatory lending practices
9 to entice veterans to enroll. I've included more in
10 my testimony about what Chair Barron raised earlier
11 about the federal law the 90/10 Rule that
12 incentivizes for-profit schools to target veterans,
13 and also the ways in which the federal government has
14 failed in its oversight of for-profit schools, and
15 I'd be willing to answer any questions on either of
16 those topics. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. It's
18 very important.

19 PROFESSOR PETER AWN: Thank you so much,
20 Chairman Deutsch and Chairwoman Barron for allowing
21 me to testify. My name is Peter Awn, I'm Professor of
22 Islamic Religion and Comparative Religion at
23 Columbia. For over 20 years I was Dean of the School
24 of General Studies, which is Columbia's College for
25 Returning and Non-Traditional Students. Currently, I

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2 am the Chair of the Advisory Board of the Columbia
3 Center for Veteran Transition and Integration. In
4 1947, because of the influx of thousands of veterans
5 to the Columbia campus, Columbia created a new
6 liberal arts college called the School of General
7 Studies whose mission was to recruit, advise, support
8 and educate students with untraditional backgrounds
9 especially the veteran community. So where Columbia
10 College recruits traditional students, GS recruits
11 non-traditional student, but both communities are
12 mainstreamed into the identical undergraduate
13 program. So they're in class together, they take the
14 same courses with the same faculty, they're held to the
15 same high standard. In early 2000, we began once
16 again to reactivate our Veterans Program at GS. In
17 the beginning it was a lot of trial and error, where
18 do you go, building relationships with the military
19 and the Montgomery Bill at the time provided minimal
20 support. So, by 2008 we had 59 vets with the advent
21 of the post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009. In the 2017-2018
22 academic year, we had 493 undergraduate veterans or
23 about 750 all tolled on campus. The challenges,
24 however, for highly selective private schools is
25 that, in fact, Columbia is outlier. The higher up

1
2 the food chain of selective schools you go, the fewer
3 veterans you're going to find. One of the challenges
4 is the admissions process, which is designed almost
5 exclusively to examine metrics based on a high school
6 student's record. So, it's your—your test scores.
7 It's your rank in your class. It's your—the extra
8 curricula as you've done. So, if you come in as a 25-
9 year-old veteran, as an applicant, and you have a
10 strong, but not dazzling high school record, you're
11 out of the system. It's a one size fits all model,
12 which makes it nigh on impossible for the majority of
13 veterans to achieve access into highly selective
14 schools. We were lucky at Columbia. By having [bell]
15 GS, we were able to create a completely different and
16 holistic set of metrics to evaluate students where
17 they are in their lives. So we look at the high
18 school record, but we're able to emphasize what has a
19 veteran achieved during her time in the military, and
20 we find that many of them have achieved
21 extraordinary, extraordinary things, and we look for
22 actual academic performance. So, the admissions
23 issue is critical in dealing with private schools.
24 Next is recruitment. Private schools go to high
25 schools to recruit. For an untraditional student,

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2 you have to learn to engage community colleges. We
3 have a deep, deep relationships across the country
4 with highly sophisticated community college programs
5 where frequently you're going to find veterans, and
6 veterans, in fact, should be encouraged to test the
7 academic waters at a community college, and if they
8 excel then they're ready to look broadly at a 4-year
9 education also engaging in the military, building the
10 relations that will allow you to access transitioning
11 veterans as they are, in fact, going through the
12 process. Finally, there is really the cultural,
13 social and support system. You need deep and
14 engaging advising, health services and psychological
15 services have to be attuned to veteran students.
16 There have to be academic support systems that are
17 robust and truly engage students, and finally, we've
18 found it's essential to have skilled financial aid
19 officers who can deal with the VA and manage all of
20 the veterans' benefits. The less a veteran has to do
21 with dealing with the VA, the more he or she is able
22 to focus on their education. Out of this has
23 developed the Columbia Center for Veteran Transition
24 [bell] and Integration because we're not going to
25 have 5,000 veterans on the Columbia campus. And so,

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2 it's an attempt to reach our broadly to the country
3 and to the 200,000 veterans who are cycling out every
4 year to give them the tools to transition from the
5 military to education, education to the workforce.
6 And so, our first look, as Commissioner Sutton
7 mentioned, is university studies for veterans, which
8 was developed really based on a course we require of
9 all incoming GS Students. It's basically learning
10 how to learn all over again since so many of our
11 students have a break in their education. The next
12 is working with Fourblock which was mentioned before,
13 which is perhaps the most effective career readiness
14 program. We have put that--

15 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Would
16 you repeat that? Working with--? I didn't hear you.

17 PROFESSOR PETER AWN: Four--it's called
18 Fourblock. It's one word. F-O-U-R then capita B-L-
19 O-C-K. It's one of the most and I would say probably
20 the most successful career readiness program. We
21 help put all of their 36-hour curriculum online,
22 create a training--a training module for them, and now
23 the next iteration was we launched this month
24 Fourblock online bringing together incredible
25 luminaries in the workforce world, transition world

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2 to really be the instructors for this course online.
3 The next mode, which will appear in the spring, is
4 attaining higher education. What kind of decision
5 making process must a veteran go through to try to
6 determine what is going to be best for them? We want
7 them to find the right place to complete whatever
8 kind of educational trajectory they-they envision for
9 themselves, and then to have mentors and student
10 mentors who would help them [bell] through admissions
11 process, and advise the student-affairs advisors who
12 will then mentor the application to do the admissions
13 process at the various schools. We're also very
14 involved with the Department of Defense. We helped
15 launch the Veterans and Higher Education Initiative
16 Collaborative, which brings together about 40
17 colleges and universities from around the country to
18 ask these same questions about veteran transition.
19 We're also charter members of Veterans On Campus. We
20 work with lots of ESOs and other veteran
21 organizations. So, that was a little more than three
22 minutes. I apologize. [laughter]

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We're not counting.

24 PROFESSOR PETER AWN: Good.

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CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: It was very

informative. Thank you very much.

ANGEL VASQUEZ: Okay, good—good

afternoon, Chair Barron and Chair Deutsch. My name

is Angel Vasquez (sic) and I actually want to provide

a student testimony. I'm a full-time student at

Lehman. I'm also a VA work study at the Office of

Veteran Affairs at Lehman College. So, I came to

Lehman in the fall of 2017 as a transfer from Monroe

College and I just had my first daughter a few months

prior, and I was separated from the military in 2016.

So, originally when I got out of the military I went

to Monroe College. I finished my degree in medical

administration, and then I decided to go to Lehman

after I had my daughter. It was difficult. I was

also switching benefits so I don't use Post-9/11. I

use Chapter 31 Vocational (sic) and that was one of

the problems that I had at Monroe and I didn't find

out about that until I wanted to go to Lehman. So, I

had a problem with my application where I submitted

in for a fee waiver, and for some reason I guess my

mail just got lost, and by the time classes came to

start, I still didn't know if I had been accepted to

Lehman yet. So, I decided to call CUNY Central and

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2 immediately they got on it. They found my
3 application. They waived all fees, and by the end of
4 the week I was already picking my classes. So, that
5 was amazing they expedited my process when originally
6 it takes 6 to 8 weeks to process. So, after that I
7 was kind of—I had to get the ball rolling as far as
8 selecting classes, figuring out what I was going to
9 do since I was on such a time crunch. I immediately
10 went to the Veterans Office down at Lehman and I met
11 with the Director Luis Soltero Rodriguez, and we sat
12 down and we figured out a plan that was kind of more
13 tailored to me because I had an infant. My daughter
14 was only five months at the time. So, instantly I
15 got my health and I managed to get everything done in
16 one day. They made everything easy for me, and they
17 showed a lot of support. I didn't really know how I
18 was going to do this, but I ended up actually
19 throughout the semester just bringing my daughter to
20 class with me, which was great because most of my
21 professors didn't even bat an eye. I had my infant
22 with me in class throughout the whole semester and I
23 was able to succeed that way, So, everybody at
24 Lehman made it easy for—kind of for me to go in.
25 When I finally got my foot in that semester, the

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2 following semester I decided to apply for VA work
3 study, and I ended up working right in the office
4 with veterans. So, first hand I was able to see the
5 problems that veterans have. I was able to learn a
6 lot under the director's tutelage. It was amazing
7 and I'm actually still working there right now. So,
8 the—everything has been great support wise. There's
9 always an opportunity if there's a question that you
10 need answered, you can go to us and get it answered,
11 and if we don't know the answer we will go get the
12 answer. We'll sit down and we'll find it with you.
13 We utilize the space the best we can. I actually
14 just had another baby two months ago, and the office
15 has been great as far as working with me with my
16 schedule. On campus we only have one lactation room
17 and the lack of office space in general—it's on the
18 far side of the campus. [bell] We've done our best
19 to kind of utilize that space. I can do what I need
20 to do and still stay at work. So, it's everything
21 about office has been supportive as far as veterans
22 go. There are veterans out there that do have Post
23 9/11 and don't get covered 100%. So, we offer every
24 single information available for them as far as not
25 just financial aid, they need to use VTA, which is

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2 Veterans Tuition Assistance, but it's not available
3 during the winter, which is after because it's the
4 next course of only three weeks. So, State Aid
5 doesn't cover that, and there are a lot of veterans
6 that don't want to use their GI Bill benefits for
7 just those three weeks. So, we inform them on all
8 the things that they can do. If they—if they're not
9 eligible for Post 9/11, we inform them hey if you
10 have a disability rating of 20% or more, go to Bulk
11 Rehab, which is where I'm at right now. So,
12 everything—the limited amount of space that we use,
13 we use it to—for our students to study, for students
14 to come if they need to get a minutes away, if they
15 need to speak with the director about any problems
16 they have with certification. Everything goes on in
17 that office, and it's such a small space, but we
18 maximize it the best that we can. We this semester
19 got the Veterans Club up and running. So, we're
20 trying to establish that brotherhood and camaraderie
21 that we all love so much about the military. We're
22 trying to get it back and we've had a successful
23 turnout with all events this semester. So, that's
24 everything that Lehman has done for me, and there's—
25 there are some things that need to be improved upon,

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2 but personally my testimony is that they've been
3 nothing but helpful to us in our education. Thank
4 you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much.
6 We're over time, but I just want to comment briefly.
7 I want to thank CUNY Central for facilitating you
8 getting in, acknowledge them. We beat them up often
9 so we want to knowledge when they do their job, and I
10 want to thank you for sharing. I will read your
11 testimony in full because your—the university is
12 highlighted as one that's at the top, and I
13 appreciate the fact that you have alternatives to
14 deciding who will be able to be admitted. I think
15 that's very important and it gets to the point of my
16 position for the single test that used in New York
17 City for their elite schools. It supports what I
18 talk about other kinds of criteria, and yes, we hope
19 that the federal government will be more select and
20 perhaps decide that there are some institutions that
21 should not be on the list to be included because of
22 the violation of what they do, and the poor results
23 that they get. So, thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. I just
25 want to—now I know why your name is Angel, and it's

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2 really nice to hear that story especially during the
3 holiday season, and it's---really I-I got chills down
4 my spine. So, I want to thank everyone for
5 testifying. We have one more panel here.

6 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: We do?

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, one more
8 panel. So, don't go away, and then we'll go on
9 commercial break. Our next panel Coco. Come on down
10 Samuel Mulik, Hannah Sinoway. [background
11 comments/pause] We'll start with Hannah. Yeah,
12 we're going to be--yes, so people are waiting for this
13 room here.

14 HANNAH SINOWAY: Chairman Deutsch--

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] It's
16 got to be a secret pass there. (sic)

17 HANNAH SINOWAY: --and Chairwoman Barron,
18 distinguished members of the Committee on behalf of
19 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and our
20 more than 425,000 members, I would like to thank you
21 for the opportunity to testify here today on the
22 pending legislation. My name is Hannah Sinoway, the
23 Chief Services Officer with IABA's Rapid Response
24 Referral Program, or RRRP for short. RRRP is IABA's
25 high tech, high touch referral service for veterans

1 and their families with a complete and comprehensive
2 case management component. To date, we've served
3 over 9,000 veterans and family members and over 1,000
4 veterans and family members in New York City alone
5 providing critical support, and resources to ensure
6 this city's veterans' needs are effectively met.

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8 Defending the GI Bill is an extremely important part
9 of our work, and as highlighted in our Big Six
10 priorities for 2018. According to our most recent
11 member surveys, the Post 9/11 GI Bill is an extremely
12 popular program. Ninety percent of our members have
13 used, plan to use or have transferred the benefit to
14 a qualifying dependent. Out of the vast amount of
15 our members that have used the Post 9/11 GI Bill, 74%
16 said they had a good or excellent experience. IAVA
17 led the charge in 2008 to pass the first Post 9/11 GI
18 Bill. Our leadership in 2008 to spearhead this
19 landmark legislation was extremely important. For
20 the next decade IAVA fought for and defended the Post
21 9/11 GI Bill from advocating for the Post 9/11
22 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvement Acts
23 passed in 2010 to defend the GI Bill against cuts in
24 taxes in 2016, and 2017, and passing sweeping new
25 improvements to the benefit in the Harry W. Colmery

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2 Veterans Educational Assistance Act otherwise known
3 as the Forever GI Bill. Additionally, 88% of IAVA's
4 members believe that the Post 9/11 GI Bill is either
5 extremely important or important to transitioning
6 service members, and almost 90% oppose any cuts to
7 the benefit, which is why IAVA's continue effort to
8 defend the GI Bill from cuts, waste and abuse will
9 last long into the future. In August 2017 with the
10 backing of IAVA and many other veteran service
11 organizations, the Colmery Act was signed into law
12 marking one of the largest expansions of veteran
13 educational benefits since the original GI Bill in
14 1944. This expansion created a need for updated IT
15 infrastructure within the VA to address new
16 provisions in the law such as modified monthly
17 housing allowance payments. According to the
18 legislation, the VA had a deadline of August 1, 2018,
19 one full year after passage. To implement these
20 changes, and as of this hearing, the VA has yet to do
21 so. On October 10 well into the fall semester, the
22 VA publicly acknowledged longer than normal
23 processing times on their website and gave
24 instructions for students who were experiencing
25 financial hardships such as falling behind on rent,

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2 utilities [bell] or other important bills. On
3 November 15th the VA testified in front of the House
4 Veterans Affairs Committee on these pressing issues,
5 but representatives of both parties didn't appear to
6 get the answers they were looking for. Since then,
7 the VA has decided to delay implementing the revised
8 MAH under the Colmery Act until the spring of 2020.
9 Until then student veterans will continue to be paid
10 under the old MAH rates while the VA works to upgrade
11 their IT infrastructure to comply with the new law.
12 In the past couple of weeks, our Rapid Response
13 Referral Program has received more than 20 inquiries
14 from veterans reaching out reporting that due to lack
15 of GI Bill payments, they are now facing serious
16 financial crisis including eviction, lack of food and
17 clothing, transportation challenges and utility shut-
18 offs. Across the country because of these delays in
19 payments, many veterans are now facing significant
20 challenges that directly threaten their livelihood,
21 and wellbeing. As we head into the spring semester,
22 we ask the DVS to be extra vigilant for student
23 veterans facing financial distress. While the VA has
24 worked to clear delayed payments, the entire
25 community needs to remain alert to ensure that this

1
2 problem does not repeat in the future. Members of
3 the committee, thank you again for this opportunity
4 to share IAVA's views on these issues today. [pause]

5 SAMUEL MOLIK: Oh, not erase. Thank you
6 very much, Chairwoman. Good afternoon and thank you
7 to both chairs and the committees for the opportunity
8 to testify today. My name is Samuel Molik. I'm the
9 Director of Policy and Legislative Advocacy for the
10 New York City Veterans Alliance. Member driven and
11 grassroots policy advocacy, community building
12 organization that advances veterans and their
13 families and civic leaders. On behalf of our members
14 and supporters we state our firm support for Intro
15 1047, and we applaud the Public Advocate and this
16 Committee for introducing supporting this bill that
17 ensures that our city resources are used to protect
18 veterans from predatory for-profit institutions that
19 seek to exploit their hard earned educational
20 benefits without providing a high quality education
21 and support they deserve. This is a nationwide
22 problem that our current presidential administration
23 has only sought to further deregulate and we need for
24 city government to step in with solutions. We
25 strongly urge this committee to pass and to implement

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2 Intro 1047 without delay. When Public Advocate Tish
3 James introduced this bill last July, our founding
4 director Kristen Rouse, a veteran of the war in
5 Afghanistan who herself used the GI Bill to earn her
6 degrees stated that it was more important than ever
7 to root out bad actors preying upon the more than
8 12,000 student veterans in our city attempting to use
9 the rich educational benefits that they've earned.
10 Advocates have fought hard in recent years to expand,
11 protect and defend what is now the Forever GI Bill.
12 But these benefits seem to be continuously in peril.
13 Even as we still have troops fighting and losing
14 their lives in our nation's ongoing wars, whether it
15 is delayed GI Bill payments because of VA failures at
16 the federal level or predatory bad actors exploiting
17 benefits locally, student veterans need every measure
18 of support and advocacy that our city can provide.
19 Even as I speak, two New York City Veterans Alliance
20 members are meeting with members of Congress on
21 Capital Hill alongside the Iraq and Afghanistan
22 Veterans of America to demand accountability on
23 recent failures in getting student veterans the
24 payments due them and to defend the GI Bill in
25 addition to other vital concerns for New York City

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2 veterans. I will tell you what they are telling our
3 Congressional delegation: The time to act is now. In
4 a report released just this month, the VA's own
5 Inspector General estimated that \$2.3 billion could
6 be going to for-profit schools without proper
7 academic accreditation because of massive oversight
8 failures. It has been well documented over the past
9 decade that for-profit institutions target veterans
10 for the GI Bill benefits saddling student veterans
11 with debt for degrees that too often can't be used
12 for the careers that they were promised. In a 2014
13 U.S. Senate Report, it was documented that 66% of
14 veterans who attended for-profit colleges using GI
15 Bill benefits, left that program without a degree,
16 and as the Chairwoman had already brought up—I'll—
17 I'll skip the part of my testimony detailing the
18 90/10 Rule, but I will say this, in 2011 a senior
19 official at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
20 work in a New York Times Op-ed that this loophole
21 gives for-profit colleges an incentive to see vet
22 service members as nothing more than dollar signs in
23 uniform, and to use aggressive marketing to draw them
24 in. Correctives passed under the Obama
25 Administration have been repealed under the current

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2 Administration as have ethics rules at the VA that
3 otherwise brought some measure of accountability to
4 ensure student veterans receive a quality education
5 in return for the GI Bill benefits they've earned by
6 putting their lives on the line for our nation. We
7 need our city government to step-step up for veterans
8 with the vital support and protections that Intro
9 1047 would provide. With Vet Connect NYC a robust
10 staff of outreach specialists in consistent
11 connectivity with city and state agencies, the NYC
12 Department of Veterans Services is best prepared to
13 serve as a hub of information and resourcing for the
14 latest in veteran educational benefits, best
15 practices and identification of institutions that are
16 not meeting their obligations to our student
17 veterans. This is substantive action that is needed
18 now. We urge this committee to pass the bill without
19 further delay. As our Founding Director Kristen
20 Rouse stated at the bills introduction last July:
21 "Veterans need support and resources in order to
22 succeed. Our city government just martial all
23 available resources to root out bad actors
24 profiteering off of the benefits rightfully earned by
25 veterans." On behalf of the New York City Veterans

1
2 Alliance, thank you for the opportunity to testify
3 today. Pending your questions, this is my testimony.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Michael
5 and thank Kristen.

6 SAMUEL MOLIK: Samuel.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, Samuel. Okay,
8 just making sure you're listening to me [laughter]
9 You're paying attention. Good job.

10 COCO CULHANE: Hi. I'm Coco Culhane.
11 I'm the founder and Director of the Veteran Advocacy
12 Project, and we provide free legal services to low-
13 income veterans and their families. I'll keep this
14 very short. I just—I was surprised today at the lack
15 of attention paid to certain challenges that student
16 veterans face, and I have never heard of a veteran
17 being eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and not
18 knowing it ever. I mean I, you know, and I think
19 it's important to speak to the building who are
20 working in those offices in the CUNY offices and who
21 are working with the vets, and they're the ones who
22 really know what's going on and know what the
23 problems are. Unfortunately, in my position, we see
24 people when things go wrong. Right. So my
25 perspective is always very negative, but what I will

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2 say is that so many New York students are not on the
3 Post-9/11 GI Bill. They're on food stamps. They are
4 struggling like a lot of other New Yorkers to juggle,
5 you know, jobs, school, kids all of it, and that is a
6 huge population in—amongst student veterans, right,
7 and so today really I feel like it's focused on the
8 Post 9/11 GI Bill and there are challenges there,
9 too, but really when things start to go wrong, no
10 matter what your funding source is no matter if your
11 at a for-profit or non-profit school, things start to
12 go wrong, and those debts start stacking up. And
13 that's we see and, you know, that's where the people
14 who are working in these offices are so important,
15 and they're so key to reaching those student veterans
16 and sending them to places like IAVA to BAP, to NYLAG
17 to all kinds of, you know, to get them connected so
18 that they can stabilize and seek the treatment they
19 need. You know, whether or not it's just an
20 overwhelming transition or it's actually someone.
21 We—we had a student who came back from war, and had,
22 you know, I'm not a clinician, but it was very clear
23 he had severe PTSD, and had failed out of a CUNY
24 school, and was using that roughly \$4,000 a month to
25 support his undocumented family, and was then owed

1
2 money back to the VA. Like the challenges just stack
3 up, and I think that that's a reality that didn't
4 quite get touched on enough today. I think it—it
5 started to with—and I-I feel bad. I'm not a veteran.
6 I shouldn't be speaking to this, but I just really
7 wanted to highlight it that those are the—those
8 challenges are out there, and they're important.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Coco and
10 thanks for your testimony. As you know, the not-for-
11 profits are crucial for our veterans, and you're all
12 doing an amazing job, and when you do it—when you do
13 work even if it's once a day, send out some social
14 media to let New York City and let the world know
15 what you do every—every singled day on behalf of our
16 veterans, and we're going to keep pushing for
17 additional funding in the next budget. We were able
18 to raise it to an additional million, and that's with
19 the help of my colleagues, and so, you know, let's—
20 let's let everyone know of the work that you guys—you
21 guys do each and every day. So, sending it out on
22 social media bringing it that way (sic) and this very
23 important. So, finally, I just want to thank each
24 and everyone of you for coming out today. I know
25 some of you are off the clock, and that's very

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important when you come here, and the advocates we
have for our veterans. God bless the United States
of America, and happy holidays to everyone, and we
hope that the new year approaching that we only see
good things and—and together with the help of the
advocates and—and my colleagues, and New Yorkers we
hope that it will bring additional help to our
veterans, and if you see a veteran out on the
streets, don't hesitate to call 311, and let's make
sure we a beautiful and successful year ahead. It's
2019. Thank you. We are not adjourned. [gavel]

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 January 13, 2018