

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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January 13, 2016
Start: 1:08 p.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm,
14th Fl.

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Fernando Cabrera
Alan N. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone
Joseph c. Borelli

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

Loree Sutton
Commissioner
Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs

Todd Haskins
Chairman
Veterans Advisory Board

Samuel Innocent
Vice Chairman
Veterans Advisory Board

Amie Leonard
Staff Member
Veteran Advocacy Project
Urban Justice Center

Kristen Rouse
NYC Veterans Alliance

Lionelle Hamanaka
Military Families Speak Out

Dan McSweeney
Representative
United War Vets Council

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon, I am Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the City Council Veterans Committee.

The Veterans Advisory Board serves a significant role as liaison between New York City's 225,000 veterans and their families and their city government, however, for too many years many in the veterans community were unaware of this resources and VAB itself was often inactive, preventing them from properly fulfilling their charter-mandated responsibility of advising the administration and the Council on various matters.

After hearing from the board members and advocates, the City Council last year enacted important reforms, including bringing the VAB into local communities by having meetings in each borough, allowing the public to contact VAB members directly and making sure the Board's meetings were more transparent and accessible.

Despite these changes, there's still much work to be done. We've heard from advocates and the Board itself and the Board itself has stated such in this report. These meetings unfortunately have been

1
2 poorly publicized and attendance has been less than
3 ideal.

4 With one of the primary goals of last
5 year's reforms being greater inclusion of the
6 veterans' community, we also expanded the board
7 membership by adding additional members, but we're
8 troubled by the fact that there hasn't been greater
9 inclusion of the veterans' community at large.

10 I look forward to hearing from the
11 Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, its Commissioner,
12 General Loree Sutton, as well as other advocates on
13 how they plan to conduct greater outreach, engagement
14 and as well as the Council and how our role can be
15 improved to assist the VAB in carrying out its
16 charter-mandated duties.

17 I also look forward to hearing from the
18 VAB itself about their plans for 2016 and their
19 recommendations for the Council and the
20 administration.

21 The committee will also be voting on two
22 resolutions today sponsored by Council Member Jimmy
23 Van Bramer and our Speaker, Melissa Mark-Viverito.

24 Res. 0938 calls on the State Legislature
25 to pass and Governor Cuomo to sign Senate Bill 6087,

1
2 the New York Restoration of Honor Act and Proposed
3 Res. 0939-A, which calls upon Congress to pass and
4 President Obama to sign Senate Bill 1766 and House
5 Bill 3068, the Restore Honor to Service Members Act.
6 Last month the committee had the privilege of hearing
7 from the sponsors of these bills, Congressman Charles
8 Rangel and State Senator Brad Hoylman about how
9 crucial it is to ensure that all our veterans who
10 have been honorably discharged and served our country
11 regardless of their sexual orientation have access to
12 the benefits and services they've earned rightfully
13 through their military service. The passage of these
14 bills is important, but only a first step, a step
15 that is bringing justice to those men and women who
16 suffered from unjust and discriminatory policies for
17 far too long.

18 I wanna thank Council Member Jimmy Van
19 Bramer and Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito for their
20 leadership on these issues and I urge my colleagues
21 to support these resolutions and send an important
22 and strong message that the Council stands with all
23 of our veterans.

24 I'd like to first acknowledge the members
25 of this committee who are currently present; we do

1
2 have a quorum currently, Council Member Maisel and
3 Borelli are here; I know that Council Member Vallone
4 and Cabrera are on their way, as well as the
5 committee staff, Eric Bernstein, Committee Counsel;
6 Michael Kurtz, Policy Analyst and James Subudhi [sp?]
7 and John Russell from the Finance Division and also
8 Billy Martin, where's Billy? [background comments]
9 Here's here, okay, Billy. I know, you never get the
10 recognition you deserve, you're like the Rodney
11 Dangerfield of the staff here; [background comments]
12 no respect. [background comments] Exactly, that's
13 right.

14 I'd also like to welcome the members of
15 the Veterans Advisory Board, the Chair Todd Haskins
16 is here; we'll hear from him following the
17 administration, as well as all the advocates who have
18 joined us for today's hearing.

19 Before we call upon the administration to
20 testify, I'd ask the clerk to call the roll call.

21 COMMITTEE CLERK: William Martin,
22 Committee Clerk, roll call vote Committee on
23 Veterans, Resolutions 0938 and 0939-A. Chair Ulrich.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes.

25 COMMITTEE CLERK: Maisel.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Borelli.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 3 in the affirmative, 0 in the negative and no abstentions, both resolutions have been adopted.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We will keep the roll open for 45 minutes and we'll be very generous with that timekeeping to allow the other members to vote on the resolutions.

I will ask our committee counsel to swear in the administration and we will begin the hearing.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can you raise your right hand, please? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony for this committee and to respond honestly to council member questions?

[background comment]

LOREE SUTTON: Good afternoon Chairman Ulrich and the members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton and I remain honored as always to serve as the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to meet and address today's topic of

1
2 evaluating the effectiveness of last year's reforms
3 concerning the Veterans Advisory Board.

4 Let me start by wishing each of you a
5 Happy New Year and thanking you for your stalwart
6 dedication to the wellbeing of New York City veterans
7 and their families.

8 Looking back, 2015 was a year of strong
9 collaboration, constructive partnership, substantive
10 legislation and historic achievement for MOVA,
11 briefly summarized below.

12 Federal validation of New York City
13 benchmarked success in effectively ending chronic
14 veteran homelessness; our newly-appointed Veterans
15 Advisory Board, strategically selected to ensure a
16 diverse range of service backgrounds, community
17 engagement interests and professional expertise. New
18 York City became the first city to add the Veteran
19 Designator to its Municipal ID Card Program, known as
20 IDNYC. Our commitment to invest in veteran mental
21 health is an integral element of ThriveNYC, with the
22 First Lady's program element support for increased
23 outreach, 311 reforms to connect New York City
24 veterans and family members to the National Veteran
25 Crisis Line, as well as city resources and services

1 and holistic services across an integrated community
2 health model of care. Productive working
3 relationship with the City Council, achieving
4 multiple legislative initiatives voted into law,
5 culminating in the bill signing of Local Law 113 on
6 the Intrepid, authorizing the establishment of a
7 separate agency, the Department of Veterans Services,
8 to better serve the New York City veterans community.
9 Leadership and collaboration for special events
10 drawing national attention, such as Fleet Week,
11 Veterans Week; America's Parade, to name a few. Our
12 move to newly renovated office space at 1 Center
13 Street in historic David N. Dinkins Municipal
14 Building, named after the former Mayor, one of our
15 city's most renowned veterans. Initiation of a new
16 city tradition, the Mayor's flag ceremony, followed
17 by the posting of all service flags at the entrance
18 of City Hall during Veterans Week. Threefold
19 increase in budget and staffing capacity, historic
20 investment already yielding increased citywide
21 outreach and impact. And finally, our initial
22 planning process commences to ensure a successful
23 transition from MOVA to the Department of Veterans
24 Services.
25

1
2 Looking ahead, I find it somewhat
3 difficult these days to contain my excitement knowing
4 that we are embarking upon the next leg of our
5 historic journey on behalf of New York City veterans
6 and their families. I want to thank all who have
7 worked so hard to make our 2015 achievements
8 possible, Mayor Bill de Blasio, Speaker Melissa Mark-
9 Viverito, Chair Eric Ulrich and members of the
10 Committee on Veterans, pioneering leaders of the New
11 York City veterans community past and present, gold
12 star families, civic leaders and concerned citizens
13 who embrace the moral imperative to serve those who
14 have served us, members of Team MOVA as well as so
15 many friends of MOVA serving in City Hall and across
16 city government, the Continuum of Care Veterans Task
17 Force on ending veteran homelessness, co-chaired by
18 VA and city representatives, leading a tireless group
19 of city officials, agency leaders, service providers
20 and advocates, and lastly, the New York City veterans
21 advocates, simply the best, whose voices were at last
22 heard and honored as evidenced by the historic
23 achievements together we have achieved. Please join
24 me in a round of applause expressing heartfelt
25

1
2 gratitude and relentless commitment to make 2016 the
3 best year ever.

4 [applause]

5 Shifting gears to today's hearing topic,
6 let us take a moment to briefly recap the VAB's
7 history. Since its initial charter in 1987 under
8 Local Law 53, the VAB's role has become increasingly
9 important, as recognized by periodic updates in 2002
10 to increase its membership and in 2006, when annual
11 reporting requirements were adopted. The first VAB
12 Chairman, Vince McGowan, was elected in 2008 and
13 remained in this position until April 2015. I am
14 grateful to former Chair McGowan for his willingness
15 to serve as an information advisor assisting the new
16 VAB and providing historical continuity and counsel.

17 In March of 2015, Mayor de Blasio signed
18 Local Laws 24 and 25 to reform the Veterans Advisory
19 Board. Local Law 24 expanded the Board to 11 members
20 and required that each member have an email address
21 for board activity. Local Law 25 requires the Board
22 to meet a minimum of five times a year and to hold at
23 least one meeting in each borough. Additionally, the
24 law requires notice of each public meeting received
25 in accordance with public notice requirements of the

1
2 Public Officer's Law, recording and broadcast of each
3 public meeting in accordance with the New York City
4 Charter and inclusion of VAB policy and legislative
5 recommendations for the Mayor's Office and the City
6 Council in the VAB annual report, which is now
7 available on the MOVA website.

8 These are important measures that have
9 already strengthened the VAB's role, credibility,
10 outreach and impact, pointing towards future gains
11 for all concerned; increased representation,
12 engagement, transparency and accountability will
13 reinforce essential bond of trust and collegiality
14 upon which effective consultation, collaboration,
15 coordination and negotiation depend. These changes
16 portend a pattern of continued and increasingly
17 positive impact as the VAB engages its new chapter of
18 service, building on the foundation of its past and
19 leaning forward to engage the strength and needs of
20 current and future New York City veterans and their
21 families.

22 Following the signing of Local Law 24 and
23 Local Law 25, the Mayor and the Speaker announced
24 seven new appointments and two members who were
25 reappointed. In July 2015, the Speaker announced one

1 new member and reappointed one existing VAB member,
2 thus completing the current roster of 11 VAB members,
3 6 Mayoral appointees and 5 Speaker appointees.
4

5 In August 2015, the VA elected its new
6 leadership as follows: Chair Todd Haskins, with us
7 today, Vice Chair Samuel Innocent and Secretary Joe
8 Bello. MOVA has worked throughout the last year to
9 assist the VAB attain full compliance with these
10 requirements. In the first year of the new
11 legislation, the VAB and MOVA initially worked
12 through various logistical challenges, such as
13 finding the most appropriate locations which provided
14 access, broadcast capability and convenient access to
15 public transportation routes. Filming of the VAB
16 meetings for broadcast was accomplished through NYC
17 Media, the New York Film Academy, various New York
18 City public access stations and volunteer filmmakers.

19 To provide better consistency in 2016,
20 MOVA is purchasing dedicated filming equipment and
21 has created a YouTube TV channel housed on YouTube
22 and linked from the www.nyc.gov website. This link
23 can be found on the MOVA webpage and will enable us
24 to broadcast and post the VAB meetings as well as to
25 archive each meeting's minutes for public viewing and

1
2 historical reference. MOVA is also working with
3 public access television to broadcast and reach
4 additional communities throughout the city.

5 In 2016, the VAB will hold its borough
6 meetings in borough halls throughout the city and in
7 other city public locations. Further, the VAB's
8 decision to post its annual schedule months in
9 advance will enable Veterans Affairs to provide
10 advance notification to the community and maximize
11 public engagement and transparency. Rotating VAB
12 meetings throughout the boroughs has already enabled
13 the VAB to provide increased access and advice to
14 MOVA on community issues of importance in real time.

15 As the MOVA Commissioner, I have
16 continued to regularly consult with the new VAB
17 leadership and greatly appreciate its members'
18 expertise and enthusiasm in assuming their new
19 duties. I have regularly engaged with the VAB,
20 consulting with and seeking their input on multiple
21 issues, including the transitional process
22 establishing our new Department of Veterans Services,
23 key community concerns and interests, best practices
24 in recruiting and retaining veterans in the city
25 workforce, regularly scheduled consultation sessions

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2 between me and the VAB chair and collaboration on
3 identifying VAB agenda items and accessing executive
4 briefings as requested.

5 Further, MOVA assisted the VAB with
6 identifying specialists from other city agencies to
7 provide executive and public sessions briefings,
8 including available New York City jobs, Department of
9 Finance tax benefits for veterans, proper
10 identification needed to apply for the City of New
11 York Municipal ID Card with a veterans designator,
12 Workforce1 and Priority1 services and introduction of
13 the new Community Outreach Specialists. These newly
14 hired specialists, like we have our manager, Vernon's
15 with us today, these specialists are currently
16 attending the VA Benefits Training Course for New
17 York State Certification and VA Accreditation,
18 following which they will provide satellite services
19 and outreach support in all five boroughs.

20 I encourage all to access the VAB 2015
21 Annual Report and meeting minutes available on the
22 MOVA website. This end of year report provides a
23 strong foundation upon which MOVA and the VAB will
24 build during this next year. I greatly appreciate
25 the work which this document represents and know that

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2 this is just the beginning of a new era of
3 achievement advancing the interest and needs of New
4 York City veterans and their families.

5 Further, I am particular grateful to
6 former VAB members for their willingness to continue
7 serving in place during this transition period as a
8 new group of VAB members were selected by the Mayor
9 and the Speaker.

10 In keeping with the core values and
11 strategic vision of the Mayor as well as the Speaker,
12 the newly appointed and reappointed VAB members
13 represent a diverse range of service experiences
14 across several areas of service, a broad expanse of
15 occupational domains and life experiences to include
16 the public, private and social profit sectors
17 spanning academia, business, art, health and
18 entrepreneurship. The current VAB membership is: Joe
19 Bello, Patrick Devine, Charles Greinsky, Todd
20 Haskins, Charles Hernandez, Samuel Innocent, Mariel
21 Juarez, Jules Martin, Wendy Charise [sp?] McClinton,
22 Anthony Odierno and John Rowan.

23 I have attached also to my testimony a
24 brief write-up on each of the VAB members; also, on
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1
2 the MOVA website there's further biographical
3 information about each of our new VAB members.

4 I think you'll agree that the future
5 burns bright for New York City veterans and their
6 families whose voices and concerns will be superbly
7 represented by this remarkable group of individuals
8 who have stepped up to assume their new duties as
9 members of the Veterans Advisory Board. I am indeed
10 proud and honored to work with such accomplished
11 veterans on behalf of those who have served us.

12 Indebted to the contributions of all who have served
13 previously on the VAB, I know that our work ahead
14 will demand our collective best efforts.

15 Looking back on 2015, the VAB met six
16 times, covering all five boroughs. The first meeting
17 was held at Chair Eric Ulrich's office here in
18 Manhattan on January 26, 2015, followed by a VAB
19 meeting on April 21st, 2015, convened at the Family
20 Justice Center in Manhattan; August 19, 2015 the VAB
21 met at the Workforce1 Center in Brooklyn; October
22 22nd, 2015 the VAB met at the Bronx Library Center;
23 November 16, 2015 the VAB convened at the Queens
24 Borough Hall, and finally, on December 7, 2015 the
25 VAB met at the Staten Island Borough Hall.

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2 Team MOVA and the VAB have worked
3 intensively over these past several months of
4 transition and implementation of the VAB legislative
5 reforms to establish clear rules of engagement, two-
6 way channels for communication and mutual roles and
7 responsibilities. Whether figuring out the logistics
8 concerning VAB meetings, consulting on questions of
9 policy and potential legislation, discussing the
10 factors involved with standing up a separate agency,
11 collaborating at community meetings aimed at
12 providing quality permanent housing to veterans or
13 participating in community events of local and
14 national scope. The VAB has also provided guidance
15 and support for MOVA's efforts on ending veteran
16 homelessness. Off to a strong and promising start,
17 MOVA and the VAB are poised to achieve even more in
18 2016.

19 In closing, I would like to thank Todd
20 Haskins for his leadership in taking the helm as the
21 VAB Chair and serving so capably to lead the
22 executive committee and the entire VAB membership
23 during these past several months. I look forward to
24 the way ahead and remain indebted to each of you for
25 all that you do and will continue to do for the

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2 greater good. New York City veterans and their loved
3 ones deserve our best. Chairman Ulrich and members
4 of the Committee on Veterans, thank you again for
5 your leadership and for this opportunity to meet with
6 you again in this new year. At this time I am
7 pleased to address your comments and questions.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Commissioner, thank
10 you, as always, for your very thorough testimony.
11 Before we begin with the questions I'll ask the clerk
12 to reopen the roll call so that Council Member
13 Vallone can vote on the two resolutions; is the
14 sergeant at arms ready? Okay.

15 COMMITTEE CLERK: Resolutions 0938 and
16 0939-A, Council Member Vallone.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I proudly vote
18 aye on both and if the Chair could add my name to
19 both, I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Certainly. Okay,
21 great... [crosstalk]

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: Vote now stands at 4.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright and we're
24 still waiting for Council Member Cabrera, so that may
25 happen, hopefully soon. Okay.

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2 So again, Commissioner, thank you for
3 your testimony and Happy New Year to you and your
4 entire staff and I wanna begin by thanking your
5 office for working so closely with the City Council
6 during the historic passage of the bill, which is
7 going to transition MOVA into and elevate it to the
8 department level and give it agency status; we're
9 very excited about that, as all the folks in the
10 veterans community are and I'm sure that the Veterans
11 Advisory Board and the members of the Veterans
12 Advisory Board will be playing a very important role
13 in advising the administration how to move forward
14 and making sure that we have many people at the table
15 to [background comment] get that going.

16 So with respect to just one of the things
17 that came up in my opening comments and also in your
18 testimony, I wanna begin by saying; do you think that
19 the Council should be doing anything to help
20 publicize the meetings or get the word out, or what
21 do you think that we can do to help the VAB get more
22 folks engaged and let them know, make them aware of
23 the fact that they are meeting in each respective
24 borough, because I know one of the concerns that we
25 hear is that the attendance has been relatively poor,

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2 but that's probably because a lot of folks don't even
3 know that it's happening, so what do you think we can
4 do, you know on our side? I know that you and your
5 staff are doing a great job in putting it on Twitter
6 and social media and emailing it out, but do you
7 think there's anything that we can do in particular
8 to...

9 LOREE SUTTON: Sure, we can join forces
10 to amplify the outreach and engagement, absolutely.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We wanna be as
12 helpful as we can because it is such an important
13 venue for veterans to go to, particularly veterans
14 with disabilities who can't come to hearings like
15 this in Manhattan, the ones that live in the Bronx
16 and Queens and Staten Island, the boroughs outside of
17 Manhattan, on an evening to voice a concern about the
18 VA; to talk about a particular piece of legislation
19 that they're very passionate about.

20 LOREE SUTTON: Absolutely.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: These are the types
22 of things that the VAB needs to hear about and I
23 think that one of the problems is that they're... it's
24 not that they're not being accessible; I just think
25 that we, meaning all of us, are not doing a good

1
2 enough job promoting those meetings, so I pledge to
3 you, if there's anything that we can do, please don't
4 hesitate to call Eric Bernstein or myself and let us
5 know if there's anything, you know, even outside of
6 the social media. If you need stamps and you wanna
7 send out invitations, we have lists and we're happy
8 to share that list with you; we just, we want people
9 to know because we have such an active and robust
10 community... [crosstalk]

11 LOREE SUTTON: Absolutely and you know,
12 Chair Haskins and I have consulted on this and
13 looking into this new year, we think that perhaps
14 greater engagement with the community boards across
15 the city, as well as... [crosstalk]

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's a great idea.

17 LOREE SUTTON: elected officials; I think
18 that there are, you know, there are ways we can build
19 on our current outreach efforts and I look forward to
20 engaging with you... [crosstalk]

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

22 LOREE SUTTON: and your team to do so
23 every year... [crosstalk]

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But that's a great
25 idea; I mean just, for instance, if you come to

1
2 Queens Borough Hall, I know Melinda Katz is a very
3 staunch advocate... [crosstalk]

4 LOREE SUTTON: Indeed.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: and a champion for
6 veterans and she has a large following on Twitter and
7 Facebook and I know that her staff would be more than
8 willing to, you know, get that word out there in
9 advance if we do it a week in advance, you know, she
10 could send out an email; we could send out an email..
11 [crosstalk]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, at the
13 borough board meeting; we just get all the council
14 members in there... [crosstalk]

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right, the borough
16 could; that's a great idea... [crosstalk]

17 LOREE SUTTON: Absolutely.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: the borough board
19 meeting; maybe a flyer, you only need 20 of them, you
20 know, 'cause there are only 14 boards in Queens, but
21 that's just an example, because if we get the flyers
22 out to the chair of each community board, they'll
23 share that with their board members..

24 LOREE SUTTON: Absolutely.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: for that month and
3 then the social media stuff I think is really key. I
4 think... I'm gonna save this for Todd, but I think
5 giving the VAB its own identity too on social media
6 would be helpful, having them have their own Facebook
7 page, their own Twitter handle, which could be
8 handled by the VAB and also with the help of the
9 administration; I think, you know, that might be
10 helpful as well. So it doesn't cost anything, it's
11 just an idea.

12 The fact that they've produced such a
13 robust report though I think speaks volumes about the
14 spirit of the law that the Council passed and that
15 was Council Member Vallone's bill, my own and the
16 Speaker, because we really wanted to take the VAB out
17 of the 19th century and bring them into the 21st
18 century and that's not a dig at any of the members
19 individually, it's just that how it was operating, I
20 mean the reports that we received in previous years
21 were basically minutes of the meeting with a cover
22 sheet and I think that's because they, in previous
23 years and the previous administration and in previous
24 time, they didn't have the support of City Hall, from
25 the Council, from the administration, they didn't

1
2 have a direction and they didn't have the clarity and
3 I think now that we're working with them, we've
4 really started and we've embarked on a new
5 relationship that I'm very excited about and I think
6 the Mayor and the Speaker have picked phenomenal
7 appointees to the Board, so. I wanna thank you for
8 helping them, for working with them and thank you, as
9 always, for your leadership; I think we had a great
10 year in 2015 and it's just the beginning; I think
11 we've built the foundation and now we're gonna..

12 LOREE SUTTON: You ain't seen nothin'
13 yet.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: we're gonna build
15 the skyscraper, 'cause the sky's the limit, so thank
16 you again for your testimony... [crosstalk]

17 LOREE SUTTON: Thank you, Chair..
18 [crosstalk]

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Real quick. It
20 was interesting last night during the Presidential
21 Address; the only time both sides of the House stood..
22 [interpose]

23 LOREE SUTTON: That's exactly right.
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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: was when they
3 mentioned the veterans, the only time the democrats
4 and republicans... [crosstalk]

5 LOREE SUTTON: Did you notice that as
6 well? Exactly. I think it just points to this unity
7 when it comes to veterans; it's not a partisan issue,
8 it's an American issue and I think that we could all
9 stand up in favor of veterans and that's as true in
10 New York City as it is nationally.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well we're very
12 proud of the work that we've done together and we
13 look forward to another great year. So thank you
14 Commissioner... [crosstalk]

15 LOREE SUTTON: Terrific.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: for being here.
17 Thank you. Okay, we will continue with the hearing.
18 We will now hear testimony from the Chairman of the
19 Veterans Advisory Board, Mr. Todd Haskins and the
20 Vice Chair of the Veterans Advisory Board, Mr. Samuel
21 Innocent. Are there any other members of the Board
22 who signed up? Dan, are you on the Board, Dan
23 McSweeney? No. Okay, not yet. Not yet. We'll sign
24 you up, don't worry. Okay, we don't have to swear
25 the panel, so you're off the hook, but I still want

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2 you to tell the truth, so that's... [background
3 comment] Thank you.

4 TODD HASKINS: First of all, thank you..

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Hit the button if
6 you can.

7 TODD HASKINS: That work?

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That works.

9 TODD HASKINS: There we go.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Can you hear me now?

11 TODD HASKINS: I can hear you now, yes.

12 First of all, thank you Mr. Chairman and
13 all the members of the committee and the staff, we
14 appreciate your focus on this topic in particular and
15 more broadly and frankly more importantly, your
16 leadership and commitment to our veterans and their
17 families here in the City of New York.

18 As mentioned, my name's Todd Haskins; I
19 joined the Veterans Advisory Board last year and was
20 elected chairman in August, and that's really when a
21 lot of the work began. The comments that I'll make
22 today are really on behalf of the entire board; as
23 you alluded to, Mr. Chairman, you know, we have a
24 pretty comprehensive report which I think is
25 reflective of a lot of common ground and a lot of

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2 work and thought from across all the board members,
3 and so these opening comments here are structured
4 loosely to follow the report.

5 First of all, let me start by kind of
6 reminding everyone why this stuff matters, why these
7 policies matter, particularly at a local level. We
8 talked about how both sides of the House stood up at
9 the State of the Union Address and I characterize
10 that component as the moral imperative and I think
11 that that's very well known, as citizens in a nation
12 with an all volunteer force, we all benefit from the
13 blanket of freedom that our military provides and in
14 order to keep that military sustainable, we need to
15 support our veterans when they come home, and that's
16 clear; I think the spirit of that ovation yesterday
17 is recognized on that.

18 When you think about veteran policy at a
19 local level, there's other considerations at play and
20 there really is an economic imperative associated
21 with that and there's a number of components to that.
22 First of all, New York is the largest city in the
23 nation, benefits from a great deal of trade and
24 tourism that are often related to veterans-related
25 activities, whether it's the Intrepid, America's

1
2 Parade, the 4th of July celebration, the Canyon of
3 Heroes, Fleet Week, etc.; these are all connected to
4 our veterans and to our military and the city
5 benefits from those.

6 Second, because veterans are so important
7 to the federal government, sound local policies
8 should attract more federal and state resources and
9 indeed we have been good stewards of those, as
10 evidenced by the success that we've had in the last
11 year and we believe and hope that those resources
12 will continue to find their way to our city.

13 And lastly; probably the most important
14 but the most difficult to quantify, is veterans make
15 great citizens. As a group, unemployment is lower,
16 earnings are higher, veterans tend to be more
17 civically active and they possess a desire to serve,
18 a fundamental desire to serve, which improves the
19 overall fabric of our community.

20 These imperatives provide important
21 context for all the policy initiatives that we should
22 consider as a city.

23 Now to take a step back, I'll go somewhat
24 briefly, since the Commissioner was quite thorough,
25 but 2015 was a foundational year, it was a really,

1
2 really important year. From a legislative
3 perspective, and thank you for your leadership, you
4 know, this committee's leadership in particular,
5 Local Laws 24 and 25, reforming the VAB, making it a
6 more relevant body that can add a more relevant voice
7 and help influence the administration and policy is a
8 really, really valuable tool and I think recognizing
9 that is... I commend you for recognizing that and thank
10 you for that. And then beyond that Local Law 113,
11 the creating of the Department of Veterans Services
12 is obviously the most important piece of legislation
13 on this topic that's come out of the City in decades,
14 and so clearly, we're excited about that.

15 A number of key initiatives were begun as
16 well. At the VAB level, you know as the time
17 sequence happened, most of the new members came on
18 board; we really got going in the second half of the
19 year, so when you think about it from a time
20 perspective, you know, we were really trying to
21 create the new policies and procedures throughout the
22 whole second half of the year that really speak to
23 the spirit of these new laws and implementing these
24 new laws and those take a little bit of time to do
25 so. Some examples are establishing of committees so

1
2 that our members can focus on areas where they have
3 expertise; we're in the process of revamping our
4 bylaws, which should be completed this year, and
5 we've been implementing standing operating
6 procedures, whether it's publicizing the meetings,
7 the processes for the meetings, etc.; those are all
8 in process and should be completed this year.

9 Second, when you think about the
10 operations and success of the City, MOVA has changed
11 dramatically throughout the year, it's budget was
12 increased more than at any time in its 29-year, it
13 started out with an authorized staff of 6 and at the
14 conclusion of the year ended with an authorized staff
15 of 20; that's a lot of change and some of the changed
16 resulted... at one point I think the head count had
17 dropped to 4 and so there's been an enormous amount
18 of change which takes time to work its way through,
19 but we're excited on the direction that that's going,
20 and obviously we expect that to continue as the
21 Department of Veterans Services is considered
22 established and ultimately funded.

23 Though really in its infancy, these
24 investments appear to be effective, based on some of
25 the achievements which have been realized. For

1
2 example, veterans' homelessness dropped by over 50%
3 and as the Commissioner alluded to, the U.S.
4 Interagency Council on Homelessness certified the
5 City as effectively free of chronic veterans. Also,
6 veterans were included in the ThriveNYC Mental Health
7 Roadmap. And veteran policies, if you think through...
8 you know the Department of Veterans Services is not a
9 direct service provider in many cases; in some cases
10 it is, but in most cases there are other agencies
11 that provide those services, but DVS will ultimately
12 have an important coordinating function to make sure
13 that those services are oriented towards accessible
14 and aware to veterans. And if you look at the
15 activities that have been done, representatives have
16 been identified at each City agency and veterans
17 programs and initiatives are being included in
18 broader... weaved into the fabric of broader agendas,
19 such as inclusion of the veterans' designator in the
20 municipal ID card.

21 While these achievements are encouraging,
22 this year in fact I think will actually be more
23 important from an operational perspective. We've
24 identified and published in our report a number of
25 strategic priorities and initiatives and in the

1
2 interest of time, I'll highlight a couple of the most
3 important.

4 First and foremost, we urge the City
5 Council and the administration to finish the job. We
6 need to ensure that the Department of Veterans
7 Services is provided with the resources it needs to
8 succeed. It will be important within that context to
9 establish the DVS with a strong mission statement and
10 that mission statement should include supporting
11 veterans' continued service to our city as civilians
12 and local citizens. Also within that, and you
13 alluded to this in your comments, among the most
14 critical areas that are currently lacking are
15 reinvestment in communications processes and
16 investment in data collection so that we can make
17 sound policies informed by data and information.

18 We're working with MOVA to help scope
19 these requirements and plan to create an opportunity
20 for the broader community to participate in that
21 process as well, which we'll likely use the VAB board
22 meetings in the first half of the year to do.

23 Second and very clearly, we must continue
24 the investment to eradicate veteran homelessness,
25

1
2 very simple, we must reach functional zero; there's
3 not much more to say on that.

4 Lastly, as these policy initiatives are
5 developed, the DVS must strive to quantify the
6 benefits that its activities have for all New
7 Yorkers, those economic imperatives that I mentioned.
8 The public is incredibly supportive of veterans right
9 now and that's great; however, we all know, as we
10 look through history, there have been times where
11 that has not always been the case and in order to
12 make sure that these programs become sustainable
13 throughout different administrations, we need to
14 quantify and create pathways to articulate to all of
15 our citizens why they all benefit from having these
16 sound programs and policies.

17 Thank you for your time and I'd be happy
18 to take any questions.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I believe that
20 Mr. Innocent wants to testify; we'll reserve
21 questions after your comments or remarks, if you
22 wanna add anything.

23 SAMUEL INNOCENT: Good afternoon Chairman
24 Ulrich, Council Member Vallone; Council Member
25 Borelli and thank you for having us today and having

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2 this hearing on oversight as far as the Veterans
3 Advisory Board and the impact of the reforms that
4 were created last year.

5 I testify in today's hearing on the
6 impact of last year's reforms; not on behalf of all
7 the members, but on behalf of my person experience as
8 the Vice Chairman of the VAB.

9 In my nine months as a member of the VAB,
10 I had the honor of seeing a great number of changes
11 in law and in practice for the veterans of New York
12 City. I applaud the Mayor's Office of Veterans'
13 Affairs for its part in helping navigate these
14 changes, because as someone who was born and raised
15 in New York City, I understand that change isn't
16 always easy or accepted and to take on such a great
17 cause is something that requires personal enduring
18 [sic] and that Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs is
19 doing just that.

20 That being said, I do believe there still
21 are ways to improve and build a better model and one
22 of these improvements is access. I know that part of
23 the intention of reforming the Board was to make it
24 more independent and transparent; I believe in order
25 to continue down that path we need to grant board

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2 members access to City resources in the form of
3 emails and email address and IDs for the board
4 members. Now this level of access is given to
5 interns who work for the City of New York and would
6 go a long way in making information accessible,
7 independent of the Mayor's Office of Veterans'
8 Affairs.

9 The next area in which I believe the
10 Board can be improved is accountability. The changes
11 to the law requiring transparency in the form of
12 posting minutes online and videotaping VAB meetings
13 for publication at a later date is great in providing
14 the community insight insofar as the VAB is working
15 for them. To make this law and this requirement
16 stronger, I believe that there should be a
17 requirement in the timeliness of publications from
18 MOVA or provide the VAB the capability to do so
19 itself, as in with social media websites -- and I
20 promise you, I wrote this before it was mentioned
21 earlier by you -- in the form of a social media site
22 or a website or something that would give the VAB its
23 own name and its own capabilities of publishing such
24 postings.

1
2 Now there's a requirement to post notice
3 beforehand and that has been met, but the
4 requirements for the minutes and the video of the
5 meetings afterwards is not as clearly defined.

6 Third and last, the way the law is
7 written now, the VAB has one opportunity to suggest
8 is proposals and that is at the end of the year
9 report, where we can come collectively together as a
10 board to voice our opinions on how policies should be
11 shaped for the next year. Though I've testified
12 twice in last year's hearings and attended many
13 hearings since being appointed to the Board, the only
14 time we can collectively speak is at the end of the
15 year report; I would like to explore the idea of
16 quarterly meetings with MOVA and those who have a
17 major role in the advancement of New York City
18 veterans, I believe this continual conversation
19 and/or reporting is the only way to work through the
20 needs of our veterans as opposed to strictly being
21 active on military holidays and in our annual report.
22 This is all the testimony that I have for today's
23 hearing. Thank you and I look forward to making this
24 the most memorable year for veterans yet.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you

1 Mr. Innocent and thank you for your service to our
2 country and your service to the Board; I know you're
3 a new appointee, but you certainly bring a breath of
4 fresh air, as do all the members, but in particular I
5 know how active you are with student veterans in the
6 CUNY system and certainly they now have a voice, a
7 very capable voice in having you serve on the VAB. I
8 think your recommendations in particular are very
9 helpful and I saw a lot of people taking notes on
10 this side, on that side, on every side and I know
11 that we definitely want to improve performance and
12 accountability; that is the spirit of the law, but I
13 think we have come a very long way from where the
14 Board was, from where this committee was; I mean with
15 all due respect to my predecessors, this Committee on
16 Veterans went several months without even having a
17 meeting; we went three years without having a budget
18 hearing and it wasn't until Mayor de Blasio appointed
19 Commissioner Sutton that we actually had a budget
20 hearing, which she was not required to even attend,
21 because it's not a City agency; they're not subject
22 to the same... not yet, but at the time she wasn't. So
23 I think that we've come a long way. But I think your
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25

1
2 idea about having other meetings outside of the five
3 meetings that you're required to have are very
4 important and Council Member Vallone and I were just
5 commenting that maybe it would be good to have a
6 meeting with the board members and the members of the
7 Committee in May before the budget is passed so that
8 we can talk to you about the budget process; the
9 Council initiative, the money that we have control
10 over, how we spend it, how we decide who gets what
11 and then you can give us feedback; maybe there are
12 other groups or other providers that we're
13 overlooking or that we're not fully engaged with, so
14 that you're in the loop as far as what the Council is
15 making a priority in the budget in May, which is of
16 course several months after this hearing. This
17 hearing though should happen every January, in my
18 opinion, moving forward; we're setting a very good
19 precedent; this report that the Chair and the members
20 have put together is one of the finest reports that I
21 think this committee has ever reviewed and received
22 and I hope that it sets the bar very high, because I
23 know that next year, well in January of 2017, when
24 we're having this hearing, hopefully we'll looking
25 back on all the accomplishments that we were able to

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2 get done with the administration, but also we'll be
3 building an even stronger report with even more data,
4 more suggestions, more recommendations for the
5 Council, for the administration that we need to act
6 on. This is not an opportunity for us to pat each
7 other on the back, there's a lot of good things that
8 we've done, but we recognize that [interpose]
9 [background comments] we recognize that we have a lot
10 more work to do, good work to do and we wanna do it
11 in a collegial way and we wanna do it in a way that
12 builds consensus in a way that is meaningful for
13 veterans in particular.

14 I have a few questions for the Chair, if
15 you don't mind, and then I'll go to Council Member
16 Vallone, that we were able to draw up in the past few
17 days.

18 First... and Mr. Haskins, again thank you
19 for the report, thank you for your testimony; I know
20 how busy you are; you have a very important job
21 outside of this; this is a volunteer position for
22 you, as it is for all the other members and I really
23 appreciate everything that you do and the time that
24 you spend here with us today and outside of today
25 because I know time is a very precious thing.

1
2 I'd like to know, have you had any
3 discussions with other board members with respect to
4 what role you think the VAB can play in the
5 transition process with MOVA becoming a full City
6 agency; how have those discussions been going; any
7 ideas or recommendations of things you think need to
8 be addressed, if you wanna just opine about that?

9 TODD HASKINS: Yeah, we've had extensive
10 discussions on that probably with... tryin' to think if
11 I've caught each individual board member; if I
12 haven't spoken with each individual board member,
13 certainly in emails throughout the Board, that is a
14 main focus of conversation; if you recall in the
15 report, our number one strategic initiative is
16 establishing the Department of Veterans Services and
17 making sure it has all the right resources to
18 succeed, to achieve ultimately our objectives. As we
19 think about it, the role of the Board has a couple of
20 factors; one, obviously is just generally providing
21 advice really to all of the constituencies;
22 officially it's to the Commissioner, but all the
23 constituencies that are involved, you know, other
24 parts of the administration, the City Council, etc.
25 But the VAB also has an important function, which is

1
2 a mechanism to communicate and connect with the
3 community and so we plan, we specifically plan; we're
4 still working out the details, but we specifically
5 plan to use the meetings that we have prior, you know
6 leading up to the ultimate creation to effectively
7 create an opportunity for the community to give
8 feedback to the administration around the
9 capabilities that they would like included in the
10 department and that hopefully the City Council will
11 fund as they include them in the proposed department.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think that's a
13 great idea. So in essence they'd be... one of the
14 earlier ideas was setting up public forums I guess
15 between... [interpose]

16 TODD HASKINS: Right.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: now and May that
18 people in each borough can come and say... [interpose]

19 TODD HASKINS: That's precisely correct.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I like this; I don't
21 like that, they do this great; they can do this
22 better and I think it is an important point you
23 raised too; the Council is now on the hook for
24 supporting this agency...

25 TODD HASKINS: Yeah.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: it is no longer a
3 Mayor's office exclusively beholden to a particular
4 administration because it is now a City agency, just
5 like the Parks Department and DOT and Department of
6 Cultural Affairs; the Council now is responsible for
7 properly funding this agency; if there are things
8 that you believe the administration needs to do, you
9 know we have an obligation to help them fund it, and
10 when we have that hearing in May, and Commissioner
11 Sutton will be there, along with the Finance Chair,
12 they're gonna say, these are our goals; this is how
13 much it's gonna cost, this is what the administration
14 is prepared to spend, but if you were able to provide
15 this, we could, you know, reach even greater heights.
16 So we wanna play an important role in the budget
17 process; without money we can't do anything. But I
18 think the VAB can be a very impartial referee, if you
19 will or arbiter in getting objective and constructive
20 ideas from the community that are not coming from the
21 legislators and the Council, that are not coming from
22 the administration, but coming from the community;
23 they'll share it with you more openly and more
24 transparently than they would share it with me or
25

1
2 with the administration, so I think that's a great
3 idea; I didn't even think of that.

4 Do you see a formal role in particular or
5 do you think that the administration should set up a
6 transition team or a committee, an ad hoc committee;
7 is that something that you've talked to them about?

8 TODD HASKINS: So we haven't talked about
9 the exact mechanics, we're sort of in the process of
10 working out the most effective and efficient means of
11 doing that; if the role would be formal or
12 information, I mean if the role is to advise the
13 Commissioner on all things related to veterans'
14 policies in the City; if the number one strategic
15 priority is establishing the Department of Veterans
16 Services, that seems like the core aspect of the
17 mission of the Veterans Advisory Board, so I think
18 that is a formal role, now that I'm hearing myself
19 say it out loud.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Hey, I think so; I
21 think I just gave you another job, I don't know, but...
22 [crosstalk]

23 TODD HASKINS: Here we go. [sic]
24
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think you're
3 definitely up to it and it's a very important one; we
4 only have one shot to do this right... [interpose]

5 TODD HASKINS: That's right.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: and we wanna do it
7 together. Council Member Vallone, did you have any
8 questions before we... [crosstalk]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, I think
10 following up on that, I think of ways to expand --
11 you know, if I'm ever having a bad day, wherever I
12 get my immediate positive energy from is from our
13 children; when you go into a school, any school,
14 public school, private school, the kids are just
15 thrilled to hear stories, wherever you may come from
16 and if there's ever a veteran that walks in the door
17 with me, the faces on the children, it's just
18 magical. And I know to the veterans that have come
19 with me were so not expecting it, you know they may
20 have been having not the best day, the best month or
21 the best year either or they didn't think in their
22 hearts they particularly were the hero that everybody
23 was looking for, but yet just wearing the uniform
24 itself is a hero. I think maybe we could build in
25 maybe a component with the DOE or some way the

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2 hometown hero concept, and it doesn't have to be...
3 like I said, just the fact that you're a veteran or
4 just returning; a way to bring the children to hear
5 the stories, to meet, to see the real heroes and I
6 think that would create such a new generational look
7 at what the impact our military has at home; that
8 they do live right here with us. You know sometimes
9 that's just great mystery for a lot of families that
10 are not military to hear the story, what was the
11 reason; what did you do, you know, even the training,
12 all that stuff is just magical to the children and
13 then to actually hear the real stories. So I was
14 thinking maybe if you guys had any thoughts on maybe
15 expanding or maybe we... 'cause Chairman Ulrich's
16 always coming up with these great ideas with our
17 commissioner; maybe there's some type of budgetary we
18 can create, 'cause maybe the vets would go in with
19 some of the informational aspect to it every time we
20 go into the different schools, but maybe in each
21 borough and each we select and try to get throughout
22 the year some additional veteran outreach for just,
23 you know, meet your local hero; hear her story, hear
24 his story and I think coming into the auditorium of a
25 school for a half-hour would be just a wonderful,

1
2 wonderful way and then you know, then parents will
3 start to hear and then the Advisory Board and then
4 what is the agency and all that starts to happen out
5 of them [sic]. Any thoughts on that?

6 TODD HASKINS: Yeah, absolutely. I think
7 that's an excellent idea and concept and you know if
8 you recall, back to the foundational principles of
9 why, why do we have those, that speaks right back to
10 the moral imperative. We have a moral imperative to
11 support our nation's military by supporting our
12 veterans and a lot of that comes in breaking down the
13 civilian military divide; right now roughly 1% of our
14 citizens serve in the military; that means
15 necessarily a lot of people don't... they're not even
16 aware what that experience is like and so along the
17 continuum of that moral imperative, creating pathways
18 to educate our citizens, particularly our children,
19 who may or may not serve in the military, so that
20 they can understand those heroes, understand what
21 that experience is like, understand.. you know,
22 ultimately they're gonna be taxpayers and they're
23 funding our military and our defense and our
24 continued economic success and I think starting with
25 the children and making sure that that is weaved

1
2 through the fabric of society is perfectly aligned
3 with that moral imperative.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So it might be
5 something we can look for [sic]. And real quickly,
6 just for anyone today; have you had any feedback on
7 the municipal ID cards now, including veteran status;
8 are veterans starting to take advantage of the fact
9 that they are entitled to a veterans ID card; has
10 there been any, you know pushback that maybe you
11 should do some things differently; anything on the
12 veterans ID card that we fought for?

13 TODD HASKINS: Yeah, so I haven't heard
14 of any pushback per se; no one to my knowledge has
15 particularly complained about it; I think they are
16 starting; I think the number at your end was roughly
17 3,000; I think there's... [background comment] I think
18 it... is it a half-a-million total? So I think at this
19 point it's slightly underrepresented, but that
20 outreach effort started after the original municipal
21 ID card started, so I think it is continuing to build
22 and you know, we actually will continue to kinda
23 focus on it and understand where it's going. The
24 interesting thing about that municipal ID card; when
25 you think about the strategy of it and to the time

1
2 back to the economic imperative; one of the economic
3 imperatives, the third leg of that stool, is veterans
4 make great citizens..

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Right.

6 TODD HASKINS: and so if one of our
7 broader policy initiatives is to attract veterans to
8 come and settle in our city, what a great welcoming
9 event to say settle in our city and you've got access
10 to the city's community institutions, etc. through
11 this veterans designator and thinking about it in
12 that way as a tool to attract veterans and get them
13 to transition here, get them to come and get educated
14 here in the largest.. we're the largest importer of
15 students of any school system in the country; that's
16 a great economic benefit to the City and if some of
17 those people stay, they become great citizens and
18 continue to help support and foster the success of
19 the city.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you very,
21 very much.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright. You know
23 on that note, I had an idea. I think.. you know
24 whenever you give something away people show up, like
25 if you have a meeting then you get 10 people, but if

1
2 you serve food you'll get 100; right? Maybe you can
3 work with the administration to have someone from
4 IDNYC at your meetings to sign up veterans and
5 include that in the advertisement that veterans can
6 attend your public hearings and they can also sign up
7 for IDNYC that night or that day; whenever that
8 meeting happens to be. I don't know logistically if
9 it could happen, but it's a good idea because then
10 they might come... [interpose]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: It's like a
12 popup component at the... [crosstalk]

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, a popup compo...
14 right...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: we just had that
16 in our...

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: at the VAB meeting,
18 'cause then they might come because they're a veteran
19 and they're interested, but they also wanna get the
20 ID and then you get email addresses and you get phone
21 numbers and you connect with them; just an idea.

22 In your report, Mr. Haskins, you
23 mentioned -- one of the bullet points on Page 17 --
24 more engagement with community through VAB meetings.
25 As the Board continues to advise on and support

1
2 policy initiatives which benefit the City, it would
3 be helpful to have more engagement from the City
4 Council and local elected and appointed officials at
5 the meetings. What are you speaking to there; what
6 is that about... [crosstalk]

7 TODD HASKINS: I think... You know, we
8 hosted six meetings last year; the Commissioner was
9 at five of the six meetings and some representatives
10 of MOVA were at all six; in fact in many cases, you
11 know, a whole team was there, in part to get the
12 community engaged and aware of and introduced to the
13 benefits counselors, etc., which is a great outreach
14 tool for MOVA as well; I think it would be useful,
15 particularly as this evolves to an agency and the
16 City Council has more responsibility at stake and in
17 its success, the more engagement and awareness that
18 we have so we understand what the City Council's
19 perspectives are and priorities are and can hear from
20 the City Council can allow a pathway for the
21 community to hear from the City Council, that would
22 be very useful.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think that's an
24 important point; I raised that with the staff here;
25 I'm gonna bring back to Laura Popa and to the

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2 Speaker's staff, but having the committee counsel and
3 the policy analyst actually attend most of your
4 meetings, if possible, just to kinda keep tabs on
5 what you're doing I think would be very helpful; it's
6 great that the administration's there, but I wanna
7 know what's going on too and I can't be in all five
8 boroughs and all places, I have obligations in my own
9 district, so I'm gonna take that back, because I
10 think that would be very helpful. I also think --
11 communication and participation is a two-way street;
12 I want the Council to be more involved in your
13 meetings and your activities, but I want you to be
14 more active with us and what I'm trying to get to
15 there is, if we are debating a bill or we're
16 considering passing a bill, I would like someone from
17 the VAB to testify on what the position of the VAB
18 is, whether it's a resolution, a bill to say, you
19 know, we've spoken with our 11 members and a majority
20 of us believe that this would be good or beneficial
21 and we support the passage of this resolution of this
22 bill; I think that would be very helpful to us,
23 because it also adds credibility to what we're trying
24 to do; not that we're necessarily doing it on our
25 own, and also again, I think it speaks to your

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2 impartiality as a referee of advocates and veterans
3 who are not, you know, beholden or in the pocket of
4 the Council or the administration, but truly
5 independent, which is the spirit of the law and in
6 keeping with your charter-mandated duties, so if
7 there are bills or resolutions that we are
8 considering before this committee or before the
9 Council, we wanna hear from you and Todd, if you
10 can't make it, send Mr. Innocent; he's more than
11 capable, your vice chair or send Mr. Bello, the
12 secretary, to testify on behalf of the Board; we will
13 put you at the front of the hearing, following the
14 administration, you'll be the first panel to come up,
15 but always feel welcomed to come here and testify on
16 a bill, resolution, a policy and let us know what you
17 think about it or how you think it can be improved.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well I'll give
19 you a war story on that; I sat for years on the Board
20 of Corrections and not once did the Council
21 committee, that oversight ever ask for us to come or
22 not even the Board knew whose Council committee had
23 oversight over us, so this type of new relationship I
24 really want to take advantage of, the Chair's
25 outreach, because it doesn't always happen and I

1 think that's the beauty of this new process we're in
2 with the Commissioner and the new agency and with
3 you, that we can really rewrite all that and it's sad
4 that sometimes there's that disconnect; you would
5 think the Council would know; sometimes there's just
6 nobody there, support -- Eric you just got a new job;
7 you're gonna be going to some of these. But I think
8 that's so critical for us to formulate the policy and
9 the budget to have your input.
10

11 TODD HASKINS: Yeah and I'd just add; I
12 very much agree and I think as you think about some
13 of the policies that we've changed or that we focus
14 on internally, talking about, you know, appropriate
15 use of information and things like that, they're all
16 aligned towards creating a venue and an opportunity
17 so that at least the 11 members of the Board can get
18 more insight into the forward calendar, you know the
19 stuff that's not yet public that the administration
20 is considering; that the City Council might be
21 considering; the Board has... we've talked explicitly
22 about, you know, maintaining information integrity
23 and not using that inappropriately until it's
24 appropriately public and as that trust builds,
25 hopefully we'll be able to be more thoughtful about

1
2 helping influence the policy outcomes for the good so
3 we can make good choices.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think the
5 Independent Budget Office is a good example of a, you
6 know, mayoral- and council-appointed professionals
7 who are very committed to the fiscal solvency of the
8 City of New York and they provide very meaningful
9 insights and testimony and an annual report prior to
10 the adoption of the City's budget and the courtesy we
11 always afford them of course is that they testify
12 after the administration in those hearings, but they
13 come up with ideas; I think that that would be an
14 interesting model for you in particular to take a
15 look at because it works and it works well and it's
16 highly regarded and respected across agencies and
17 administrations and over a long period of time and
18 it's also seen as sort like a bipartisan referee for
19 what's good and what's not so good for the City. So
20 that's the only recommendation that I would give, but
21 I have to tell you this is, again, the finest report
22 that's come before this committee; I think it sets
23 the bar incredibly high and I wanna commend you and
24 the members who worked so hard on this because you
25 did.. you did a damn fine job; I really mean that, so

1
2 thank you very much for being here today and for the
3 report; it does not fall on deaf ears. Thank you.

4 TODD HASKINS: Thank you. Thank you all.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. We're gonna
6 move on to the next panel. Thank you. We have Amie
7 Leonard, Veteran Advocacy Project; Joshua Alvarado --
8 I think I said that right -- Kristen Rouse, New York
9 City Veterans Alliance; Lionelle Hamanaka, Military
10 Families Speak Out, and Dan McSweeney, United War
11 Vets Council. Four seats, five speakers; I don't
12 know how we're gonna do this, but we'll figure it
13 out. Those are the only people who have signed up to
14 testify; if there are others, I'd ask that you see
15 the sergeant at arms because this will be the last
16 panel. We will provide four minutes for each
17 speaker; I know we normally do three, but I think
18 four is a little bit more generous; five, you want
19 five? You're pushing it, Kristen; I'm just saying.
20 Alright, I'll give... [background comment] I'll give
21 you five and we won't hit the gong, so... and we will...
22 let's... we'll give them five minutes each; that's fine
23 and you do not get to yield the remainder of your
24 time; this is not Congress, so if you don't use the
25

1
2 five minutes... use it or lose it; I'm just saying.
3 Anyway, let's start with you.

4 AMIE LEONARD: Good afternoon Veterans
5 Committee and my fellow advocates. My name is Amie
6 Leonard and I am a staff member at the Veteran
7 Advocacy Project at the Urban Justice Center. Thank
8 you for the opportunity to speak today about the
9 impacts of the Veterans Advisory Board.

10 It's important to look back on the
11 impacts of the Board over the past 10 months, but it
12 is equally important to look forward and see how the
13 Board recommendations can affect hundreds of
14 thousands of New York City veterans.

15 Per the New York City Charter, the
16 Veterans Advisory Board must submit an annual report
17 of its activities to the Mayor and City Council,
18 including policy and legislative recommendations on
19 December 31st every year.

20 Yesterday, January 12th, the Veterans
21 Advisory Board's 2015 report was made publicly
22 available; having reviewed the Board's 2015 report,
23 the Veteran Advocacy Project would like to reinforce
24 three of the Board's recommendations to the Mayor and
25 City Council. 1. Ending veteran homelessness; 2.

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2 Investing in federal and state relationships; 3.
3 Review and expanding veterans' treatment courts.

4 First, ending veteran homelessness.

5 While it was announced that New York City has
6 achieved functional zero, the business of eviction is
7 booming and veteran homelessness has not ended;
8 veterans are evicted daily and the population's risk
9 of homelessness is prevalent. As stated in the
10 Board's annual report, nearly 100 new veterans become
11 homeless every month. Furthermore, there are many
12 men and women who served our country but do not self-
13 identify as veterans, veterans who have shelter, but
14 no permanent home and veterans who may be couch
15 surfing. The City's efforts to end veteran
16 homelessness are respected, but pre-eviction efforts
17 to prevent homelessness must be increased. The
18 veterans of our city have selflessly served our
19 nation and increasing prevention efforts tells our
20 veterans we want to return that service.

21 Second, investing in federal and state
22 relationships. As mentioned in the annual report,
23 the Board believes that New York City has among the
24 most comprehensive and effective veteran programs in
25 the nation. To ensure that we continue to have the

1
2 most comprehensive and effective programs, we must
3 guarantee that veterans with less than honorable
4 discharges are supported. The vast majority of
5 veterans with less than honorable discharges are
6 denied federal benefits, including VA pension,
7 disability compensation, HUD-VASH vouchers and health
8 care. Therefore, veterans with less than fully
9 honorable discharges face barriers to housing,
10 treatment and income, all of which are essential to
11 healing and transitioning to civilian life. Many
12 veterans are not aware of the implications of a less
13 than fully honorable discharge let alone alternative
14 resources for support. The Advisory Board is in a
15 unique position to advise the Mayor's Office on these
16 gaps in services, advocate for providers to fill in
17 these gaps and educate veterans and our community on
18 the implications of less than fully honorable
19 discharges.

20 Third, review and expanding veteran
21 treatment courts. As the committee knows, Manhattan
22 and Staten Island lack veterans treatment courts;
23 many of the Veteran Advocacy Project's low-income and
24 homeless veteran clients are criminal justice
25 involved and suffer from mental health issues that

1
2 might be service connected. We support the great
3 strides that have been made for criminal justice
4 involved veterans in Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx.
5 When a veterans court is established, a community of
6 stakeholders forms around it, all of whom are
7 fighting recidivism. With the help of stakeholders,
8 the veterans treatment court can be the starting
9 point of holistic healing for a veteran, which can
10 include assistance in obtaining the benefits he or
11 she has earned. Between Manhattan and Staten Island,
12 we serve many veterans who would profoundly benefit
13 from the expansion of veteran treatment courts and we
14 hope that the review of the success in the other
15 boroughs will encourage the establishment of courts
16 in Manhattan and Staten Island.

17 In closing, we applaud the strides the
18 Board has made since the reforms of 2015 and the
19 Veteran Advocacy Project wants to support the Board's
20 call to end veteran homelessness, to invest in
21 federal and state relationships and to expand veteran
22 treatment courts. Thank you for the opportunity to
23 speak today.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you very much.
25 I have two questions for you on the points that you

1
2 raised with homelessness. Do you know if you or
3 anyone else from the Veteran Advocacy Project
4 attended any of the VAB hearings that they had to let
5 them know about this; was anybody there to sorta...
6 maybe Coco knows that, people... well alright, so it's
7 not like you're just springing this on them now, I'm
8 just... Okay, so you've been to VAB hearings, you've
9 talked with VAB members about this particular issue;
10 I think that's important, I think that's very
11 important that you participate there.

12 And with the vet treatment courts, the
13 good news is that Staten Island will be establishing
14 it very soon; I spoke with the new district attorney
15 there, Mike McMahon, who's a terrific guy, and they
16 actually... the impediment there was they were building
17 a new courthouse and they couldn't get a COO, it's a
18 long story; I don't wanna get into it here, but they
19 have a brand new courthouse, which is very nice and
20 they will have space set aside; that's what the DA's
21 told the administration and myself, for the Veterans
22 Treatment Court there and I anticipate that they will
23 have a very nice ceremony in the near future, which
24 we will all be attending and looking forward to and I

1
2 know that Staten Island has a ton of veterans that
3 live there and they certainly will benefit from that.

4 Gale Brewer, the Manhattan Borough
5 President, also a very staunch advocate for veterans;
6 her husband Cal is a very active Vietnam vet; she has
7 been pushing Cy Vance and I think they are also at
8 the finish line; I don't think they have an
9 announcement to make just yet, but I anticipate that
10 will happen soon. Because I believe, as you do, that
11 veterans should be treated fairly and equally in the
12 criminal justice system regardless of where they
13 happened to get arrested or where the alleged crime
14 took place; they should not be getting different
15 treatment in different boroughs, but I think that
16 that is a... it's a very important point that you
17 raised, but I just wanna preface that with, it's
18 happening, it's gonna happen and it's gonna happen
19 soon, so thank you for that. Kristen; you wanna?

20 KRISTEN ROUSE: Good afternoon Councilman
21 Ulrich, thank you for holding this hearing and thanks
22 also to the other committee members; this is indeed a
23 great precedent that I hope will be continued next
24 year. And thank you to the Commissioner for your
25 always encouraging testimony and what you shared to

1 inform my view of how things are going, as always.

2 And thank you also to Todd for your leadership on the
3 VAB; appreciate all the work that you've done. And
4 Sam, also, thank you for your work and your passion
5 and your leadership and for your dual-hattedness
6 [sic] as also serving as the Vice President for
7 Policy of the New York City Veterans Alliance; I
8 appreciate that.
9

10 So I do have some disappointments and
11 points of disagreement to share that I hope will be
12 constructive to the process of improving the VAB in
13 2016; we're all on the same team in the veterans
14 community here and I think we all have a similar
15 outcome in mind.

16 I do also wanna point out that the New
17 York City Veterans Alliance last June put out an 84-
18 page report detailing background and recommendations
19 for 16 local level policy initiatives to include the
20 continued improvement of the Veterans Advisory Board
21 and that report was based on the written inputs of
22 more than a dozen members of the veterans community,
23 to include a lot of folks in this room and it was
24 also based on an extensive survey and inputs from the
25 veterans community and that was the first report of

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2 its kind and I'm glad to see that it did elevate the
3 conversation that we are having here in the New York
4 City veterans community and in New York City
5 government; I think we are positioned to lead the
6 nation on this. I will keep my points brief; I do
7 have the written testimony in full for you.

8 The first point that I wanna make is that
9 we are disappointed about the attendance of some of
10 the newly appointed VAB members. Three of the
11 members attended only one in the five meetings after
12 the reforms were passed and another member attended
13 only two in person. We understand that everybody's
14 busy and that this is a volunteer position, but we
15 recommend that if VAB members choose to continue
16 serving their terms of political appointment they
17 should attend more than half of the meetings and be
18 part of the VAB's important presence in communities.
19 It should go without saying that if the VAB is
20 required to hold in-person meetings in all five
21 boroughs, then most of the VAB's members should be
22 there too.

23 The second point I want to make is about
24 the current email addresses, which are gmail.com
25 addresses; I concur fully with Sam's suggestion that

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2 these be City email addresses. I tried out some of
3 the emails and I got a return from one of the VAB
4 member addresses saying that the address actually did
5 not exist. So if the intent to have VAB members be
6 accessible as representatives of the veterans
7 community who we can reach out to, then the
8 **[inaudible]** has not yet been met.

9 Another point is about the meeting
10 notices, which is something that's already been
11 brought up. The meeting notices this year have not
12 been in compliance with the requirements of the
13 reforms. The VAB is required to publish notice of
14 each public meeting in accordance with Article 7 of
15 the Public Officers Law, with meetings scheduled at
16 least one week in advance and the announcement made
17 to news media and posted conspicuously in public
18 areas at least 72 hours in advance. The VAB is
19 further required to notify veterans organizations by
20 email and post the notice on MOVA's website at least
21 one week in advance. These requirements were not
22 met. For example, the November meeting was announced
23 by email and on social media, which is a conspicuous
24 area, only four hours in advance of that meeting.
25 Other meetings had come on such a consistently short

1
2 notice that many of us, such as myself, were unable
3 to attend. Again, we realize everyone is busy, but
4 these last-minute announcements are not only out of
5 compliance with the law, but they also minimize the
6 attendance and participation of the public and
7 veteran organizations in these important meetings.

8 My fourth point; last year's reforms
9 require the VAB to record and broadcast each meeting
10 in accordance with Section 1063 of the City Charter.
11 While we realize that they were broadcast, there was
12 never any announcement of broadcast times for the
13 meetings and there had been no link or mention of any
14 video recordings until they appeared yesterday on
15 MOVA's website in advance of this hearing. This is
16 better late than never, but again, you know coming at
17 such a late hour, again, minimizes participation and
18 public understanding of what the VAB is and does.

19 Fifth point and most importantly, the
20 VAB's task is to advise New York City government on
21 "all matters concerning veterans" and to keep a
22 record of its deliberations to that end. It must be
23 noted here that as of this testimony there have not
24 been any records of the VAB's actual deliberations
25 posted online in the meeting minutes or elsewhere.

1 Meeting minutes only briefly describe presentations
2 by MOVA and City agencies and announcements of events
3 or initiatives that a VAB member might bring up.

4 There are also brief notes showing public testimony,
5 although there is no detail or follow-up noted [bell]
6 for any of the concerns or issues raised by members
7 of the public indicating that VAB members are even
8 addressing this in their deliberations. There has
9 also been no record of any actual advisement that the
10 VAB members or the VAB as a body have made to MOVA,
11 City Council members or any government agency over
12 the course of the year. I've heard anecdotally and
13 also in the Commissioner's testimony this afternoon
14 about VAB members acting in an official capacity over
15 the last several months, meeting and speaking
16 privately with agencies, public officials and
17 organizations, yet there is no public disclosure of
18 who, when and where the VAB members are meeting or
19 acting in this official capacity or what issues were
20 even addressed.

21
22 Last year's reforms required the VAB to
23 be transparent in its official functions, yet the VAB
24 is failing to disclose its actual activities and
25 functioning outside of the public portion of its

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2 meetings. It's disappointing that even after last
3 year's reforms the VAB is little more transparent
4 than it was previously.

5 Lastly, the VAB's end of year report,
6 which I realize, having led our own report, takes a
7 lot of work and it's supposed to be a summary of the
8 VAB's advisement over the course of a year; it was
9 mandated to be completed by December 31st; it was
10 made public yesterday in advance of this hearing.
11 The report states repeatedly that good policy
12 recommendations are important, but it also only
13 appears to state what MOVA is already planning for
14 its transition into DVS later this year. It
15 appeared, at least to me as a reader, to be a report
16 by MOVA to the veterans community, which would be the
17 first time that MOVA has actually produced any
18 written product for the community, but it does not in
19 any way, at least in my reading again, reflect
20 deliberations by VAB members or advisement of the VAB
21 to MOVA on behalf of the veterans community. There's
22 no mention of recommendations or input from members
23 of the public who spoke during the meetings, which
24 included members of my organization, such as veteran
25 street vendors, who were at most of the VAB meetings

1 last year, or the property tax exemption issue that
2 has been brought to the VAB and to City Hall for
3 several years now with no results. Meeting minutes
4 show a VAB member, for example, stating that he would
5 refer this to the Public Advocate's Office, but
6 mention of deliberations or meetings with the Public
7 Advocate appear nowhere in the end of year report.
8 In short, the VAB's end of year report is interesting
9 and important, but not what was mandated by last
10 year's reforms. If the VAB is indeed advising MOVA
11 or other government entities, the end of year report
12 should reflect the deliberations of VAB members and
13 the outcomes of what they advise based on its public
14 meetings and other official activities and
15 deliberations. If MOVA wishes to issue a public
16 report, we recommend that it do so through its own
17 channels and not use the VAB as its mouthpiece.

18
19 In summary, VAB appointees should
20 continue to serve in their appointed government roles
21 only if they can regularly attend meetings in person,
22 be accessible and interactive with the New York City
23 veterans community and disclose their official
24 functions in a written record in order to provide the
25 transparency required by last year's reforms.

1
2 Meetings need to be announced in advance and any
3 written report must show that the VAB is actively
4 advising MOVA and other government entities and not
5 the other way around. Thank you for your patience
6 and this concludes my testimony.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you for
8 your testimony. I just wanna make a few comments.
9 As I said earlier, this is not an opportunity for us
10 to pat each other on the back and congratulate each
11 other, because we can always do better, I can do
12 better, everybody can do better.

13 I agree with the attendance requirement;
14 I think that's something the Board should take up
15 internally; I think if they have five meetings,
16 people should attend three of them; the community
17 boards operate the same way, if you miss x amount of
18 meetings you're automatically taken off the board,
19 but that is something I think needs to be..
20 deliberation needs to take place internally; I don't
21 think that we necessarily need to legislate that, I
22 think they can sort of police themselves and I trust
23 they will, in light of the fact that some of the
24 board members are not able to make it all the time
25

1
2 and we want them to make it because it's very
3 important why they're there.

4 The transparency stuff is important too,
5 I think the transparency stuff, certainly if they
6 submit testimony on behalf of a bill or an issue or
7 they come before the Council, that should be
8 available online and maybe when the department gets
9 up and running they'll have a section for the
10 Veterans Advisory Board which will be their own page;
11 I think that would be helpful.

12 And I think the email address is
13 something that sounds like a no-brainer, but I'm sure
14 DoITT, you know, would take a long time to do that,
15 but they probably should do that, I think it's very
16 easy to create an email address at VAB.nyc.gov, I
17 mean it sounds simple, but I mean I could be wrong.

18 But you know some of the other things I
19 think need to be addressed, you know looking at it
20 from all perspectives; with respect to the timing of
21 the report, the law mandating that they had to
22 actually produce this report by December 31st was
23 passed almost in the middle of the year and I think
24 that they experienced some growing pains, as any new
25 organization would; I trust and I believe that next

1
2 year the report will be done and sent to the Speaker
3 and the Mayor by Decem... not next year, but this year
4 will be sent to the Mayor and Speaker by December
5 31st, but I just think that logistically getting 11
6 people to agree on one document, I mean it's not
7 exactly the Declaration of Independence, but you know
8 getting 11 people to have all of their input, all of
9 their insights, all of their tweaks and their
10 comments and suggestions takes a little bit of time
11 and I would venture to believe that they're gonna
12 start this year's report much sooner than they were
13 able to start. So I mean what I'm saying is, I'm not
14 holding their feet to the fire for that because they
15 produced a very good report; we still had the
16 oversight hearing in January, which is when we would
17 have it anyway; we're not gonna have it on January
18 1st and would I have liked to see it three weeks ago?
19 Sure, but they couldn't get it done; I forgive them
20 and they get a pass, so next year we'll get it on
21 December 31st and everything will be fine.

22 The broadcasting and the other issues I
23 think are important; we wanna make sure that they are
24 compliant; I think they wanna be fully compliant with
25 the law as well, but they don't have a budget, which

1 is always a topic of conversation at this hearing,
2 but you know, they're kinda reliant on MOVA and at
3 some point they'll be reliant upon DVS, and I don't
4 think the Council has been fully supportive of the
5 VAB, to be honest, up until now. I think we've take
6 a back seat, we've appointed people and we sort of
7 winded the clock and we let it tick and if it ticked,
8 great; if it didn't it wasn't our fault, but now, you
9 know like we really need to do a better job of
10 working with them, coordinating with them, meeting
11 with them, keeping them in the loop on the budget, on
12 the Council initiatives, on the things that we're
13 funding, on our legislative priorities and then
14 engaging them and saying hey, we're having a hearing
15 in May on this topic; we want to see what you think
16 about this. We haven't done a very good job of doing
17 that; it's my fault; it's the fault of the Council,
18 so hopefully moving forward we're gonna improve that.
19 I think that the new VAB, with the new appointees and
20 the people who are on it -- if I had to grade them,
21 I'd give them an A+ and the only reason why I don't
22 give them an A++ is because they haven't fully
23 realized their own potential yet, but I think that
24 they're doing a good job, I think the report is a
25

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2 great start and I think that the recommendations that
3 you have here are excellent, are helpful and I wanna
4 see them do it and hopefully next year you will be
5 delivering testimony saying I'm glad that they
6 listened to me and they took my recommendations
7 because there's some very good stuff in here, but
8 it's a process, that's all, so and nothing happens
9 overnight, I know that; you know that. But you know
10 what, every voice counts here, I don't want anybody
11 to ever feel that they can't come here and deliver
12 testimony that some people may not like because
13 sometimes that's the best testimony we hear. So I
14 wanna thank you and I wanna let you know that
15 everything you said I listened to and I appreciate,
16 so thank you. Hamanaka next.

17 LIONELLE HAMANAKA: Hi, I'm Lionelle
18 Hamanaka **[inaudible]** Speak Out... thank you... it's a
19 national charity that is formed of people related to
20 soldiers who've served since 9/11, a peace
21 organization. And first of all I'd like to thank you
22 and also General Sutton and the Board for being
23 instrumental in achieving the new department in the
24 City; I think it's a great thing, and I'd like to
25 thank Mayor de Blasio. Of course before he was mayor

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2 he did help the military family community and also
3 veterans, so I'm not at all surprised and the fact
4 that he's given more money to MOVA just shows that
5 General Sutton's hard work with her staff has, you
6 know, gotten attention.

7 I just wanna make one sentence about the
8 resolution today to restore honor. A soldier's
9 sexual orientation has nothing to do with their
10 ability or their service, their contribution to the
11 armed forces, so I think it's a sort of no-brainer to
12 support to this, and thank you to the people who
13 brought it up. So that's just a one-sentence
14 statement in support.

15 The other thing is, you know I wanted to
16 just bring up a suggestion that was not my idea, in
17 terms of homelessness, veterans' homelessness, it was
18 an Iraq veteran; he was actually the first veteran
19 that I met from recent conflicts who did a complete
20 economic breakdown of how many hundreds of millions
21 of dollars New York could benefit by having a
22 stronger veteran population returning here and he
23 said, well it's my dream to have a building just for
24 veterans, another building, in other words. You
25 know, whether it's a building that's the gift of some

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2 billionare, and we have 70 billionaires in New York,
3 or a multimillionaire or a combination of federal,
4 city and state funding or whatever or a... in other
5 words, a brand new building or a building that's out
6 of use right now, like a hospital that's been closed
7 unfortunately to budget cuts. I think it would make
8 the job of the Mayor's Office for Veterans Affairs
9 maybe a little easier to have one place where they
10 could... you know, as you said, the young lady over
11 here, more people are coming into the city, more
12 people are getting evicted and there's the constant
13 influx, so you know, we're gonna have this problem in
14 the future. But if there could be a building or two
15 you know for the recent veterans, I think it would be
16 a very smart investment. Because as you said,
17 veterans make great citizens but they have to have a
18 fair shot at making the transition and we do owe it
19 to them.

20 And I'd also like to say that we're
21 standing on the shoulders of people who've come
22 before us, you know in terms of veterans courts; we
23 owe a lot to Ed Daniels...

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes we do.

25

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2 LIONELLE HAMANAKA: who had you know the
3 courage to go into Rikers Island and help veterans
4 there before there were veterans courts and the prior
5 Board, although it was very hamstrung because
6 whatever reasons, they did lower the fee for
7 licensing for street vendors and helped some of the
8 veterans who are street vendors and there's a big
9 tradition in New York of veterans like Charlie Rangel
10 and people who are in military families, like Gale
11 Brewer and other people who, you know, we're building
12 on that, so I think we're in a great time right now
13 and I look forward to more success in the future.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much.
15 As always, thank you for being here and I couldn't
16 agree with you more; I think of Mr. Daniels quite
17 often; at the bill signing I neglected to mention him
18 and that was one of the things that I told my staff,
19 I forgot to mention him, but he was definitely in my
20 thoughts; sometimes when you get up to the podium,
21 for whatever reason, things just fly out of your
22 head, but I remember him sitting in the back with a
23 cowboy hat at every hearing and the first hearing I
24 came in I said who the heck is this guy and he
25 probably said the same thing about me. But we became

1
2 very good friends and I respected him and admired him
3 greatly and I miss him and I wish he could've been
4 with us, but I have a feeling he was; I'm a man of
5 faith and I think that even when people pass away
6 that their spirit lives on and he would be very proud
7 of this hearing today and the bill signing and the
8 administration and the Council working closely
9 together to help veterans, so may he rest in peace
10 and all the veterans advocates who have just.. we
11 built so many success on their shoulders; I think
12 that's a great point. Next person, Mr. Alvarado.

13 MR. ALVARADO: Yes, good afternoon
14 Councilman Ulrich, members of the committee. I just
15 wanna say thank you for giving me this opportunity to
16 speak on my behalf, on my experiences as a veteran
17 here living in New York City.

18 A little background about myself. I was
19 born, raised and educated here in New York City and
20 growing up throughout the 90s I firmly believed that
21 the American dream was possible living here in New
22 York City. I've been home for approximately seven
23 years from active duty now, but I continue serving my
24 country as a reservist. In the last seven years that
25 I've been home, I've noticed some things that don't

1 quite fit with my model of living the American dream.
2 For example, one of the first that I wanna identify,
3 and I think everybody speaking here today has
4 mentioned, is affordable housing. I can no longer
5 live in the neighborhood I wanna live in because it's
6 just too expensive to rent a studio apartment in
7 Astoria and then when I do go online to apply for
8 affordable housing, I exceed the minimum income
9 needed to apply for affordable housing. I foresee
10 myself probably in the next few years being priced
11 out of New York City; I honestly don't have any other
12 place to call home but New York City.

14 And in tandem with that, I also wanna
15 point out that employment should be a key factor to
16 keeping more veterans and their families here in New
17 York City and it should also go beyond just saying
18 well here's a job; it should be suitable employment.
19 A lot of veterans at my alma mater at Baruch
20 graduated with degrees in finance and communication
21 but are having a difficult time finding suitable
22 employment here in New York City. I feel that the
23 Department of Veterans Services can bridge together
24 all these resources for veterans and their families

1
2 to make New York City a much better city for them to
3 live in.

4 And finally, I don't have the actual
5 numbers right now, but it's estimated within the next
6 5-10 years approximately 3 million service members
7 will be leaving the service and I want us today,
8 after this meeting, to ensure that that senior in
9 high school who's graduating in June whose gonna do 4
10 years of active duty, comes home to a model city that
11 is more receptive of veterans once they transition
12 out from active duty back to civilian life. That's
13 all I have. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
15 service, thank you for being here today and thank you
16 for everything that you do. Thank you.
17 Mr. McSweeney. By the way, I'm finishing my Master's
18 at Baruch; I don't know if you're still there, but
19 yeah. Okay. Good school... [crosstalk]

20 DAN MCSWEENEY: Chairman... Sorry.
21 Chairman Ulrich, thank you for the opportunity to
22 speak with you today. My name is Dan McSweeney; I
23 represent the United War Veterans Council here in New
24 York City.

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2 As we all know, 2015 was a landmark year
3 for veterans issues in New York. Through the
4 creation of the City's Department of Veterans
5 Services, greater and more focused efforts in the
6 great community of advocates that we have, and a lot
7 of them are represented here, the establishment of a
8 veterans designator for our new city ID cards, a new
9 and invigorated Veterans Advisory Board, great
10 advances in combating veterans homelessness and an
11 enhanced Veterans Week, we have turn a corner in
12 recognizing and offering greater support for veterans
13 and their families. These efforts have helped
14 strengthen the bonds within our ranks and between
15 citizens and government. The age-old adage that
16 nothing can replace shared effort in creating
17 community holds true. Many of our leaders agree that
18 New York is the best city in America and the world
19 for veterans and an indispensable part of this
20 recognition is the Veterans Advisory Board, whose
21 members and leadership have worked diligently to
22 establish greater outreach and coordination among our
23 diverse and talented constituents.

24 I wanna commend the VAB and its leaders,
25 Todd Haskins, Sam Innocent and Joe Bello, for all

1
2 they are doing. Their relationships with the Mayor,
3 with the City Council; with the veterans community at
4 large support a comprehensive series of initiatives
5 which will benefit all of us.

6 Since 1985, the UWVC has been involved in
7 the overall effort of supporting vets. I'd like to
8 briefly describe two areas in which we are continuing
9 and expanding our efforts on behalf of veterans and
10 the city at large working with the VAB.

11 Number one, Veterans Week. We organize a
12 series of inclusive events that keep veterans front
13 and center in New York's and the country's
14 consciousness; this culminates with America's Parade,
15 which this year attracted close to 300 participating
16 groups and over half-a-million spectators and reached
17 audiences across the United States with the right
18 messaging on the veterans community and what we offer
19 society at large. Our broadcast and online partners,
20 including Google and Military.com, allow the goodwill
21 surrounding Veterans Day to be carried far and wide,
22 including to veterans who could not attend because of
23 their stay in VA hospitals. The economic impacts to
24 New York are undeniable and they are only growing as
25 we enhance and fine-tune our work. We're already in

1
2 detail talks with the government of Los Angeles with
3 their veteran support organizations and with a number
4 of private sector entities to directly link New York
5 to Los Angeles this year, 2016, for America's Parade.

6 Number two is Prosper.vet [sic]. UWVC
7 co-founded this country's first fully integrated
8 veterans entrepreneurship platform in partnership
9 with NYU and support from city, state and federal
10 officials. We're offering education, training and
11 incubation support for our veteran entrepreneurs.
12 Their considerable talent and ambition places them at
13 the epicenter of efforts to improve the local economy
14 and has national implications; if they can make it
15 here, they'll make it anywhere and we are fortunate
16 to have a front row view of the effort.

17 I mention these two activities because
18 they fit perfectly into the VAB's strategic vision.
19 The VAB is an essential element of the interface
20 between veterans and the New York City government and
21 I share the gratitude of our broader community in
22 feeling that we owe them a lot for undertaking this
23 effort at this critical time.

24 UWVC looks forward to continuing to
25 support the VAB in 2016 and well beyond as a

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2 nonpartisan, good faith partner in our shared goals
3 and objectives. I wanna congratulate every member of
4 the VAB for their leadership, determination, Gotham
5 grit and strategic insights and I wanna thank you for
6 the opportunity to speak with you today. A side note
7 is; Vince McGowan unfortunately couldn't be here; as
8 an emeritus member of the VAB he would like to have
9 congratulated them in person, but his travel plans
10 unfortunately changed, so he says hello and he says
11 thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Please send him our
13 regards and best wishes and thank you for your
14 testimony. I wanna thank you all for coming here
15 today; I thought it was a very good hearing,
16 productive hearing. Thank the Chair and the members
17 of the Veterans Advisory Board; of course the
18 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans'
19 Affairs, soon to be the Commissioner of the
20 Department of Veterans Services; that's a long
21 business card, but we're thrilled that she's always
22 here and always available to work with us and help us
23 in whatever we are undertaking. And I wanna wish one
24 of my staffers well, he's leaving, Greg Mitchell;
25 some of you know him, some of you don't; if you

1 don't, it's your loss; he's a great guy, but he is
2 going to work for the Mayor's Housing Recovery Office
3 (HRO) to assist people who are still struggling from
4 Hurricane Sandy with the Build It Back claims and
5 other things; his last day is Friday; the party is
6 tomorrow I heard, although I wasn't invited, I don't
7 know, but he's gonna do great work, we appreciate his
8 service and all the staff. Billy Martin, thank you
9 for sticking around and Eric Bernstein, Michael
10 Kurtz, thank you all for being here; that concludes
11 today's hearing.
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13 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date January 16, 2016