

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY
WITH COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

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B E F O R E: ERIC DINOWITZ, CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS: ALICIA AMPRY-SAMUEL
MATHIEU EUGENE
ALAN N. MAISEL
PAUL A. VALLONE
MARK GJONAJ, CHAIRPERSON
SELVENA N. BROOKS-POWERS
STEPHEN T. LEVIN
BILL PERKINS
YDANIS A. RODRIGUEZ
HELEN K. ROSENTHAL

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

JAMES HENDON, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Veterans Services

DYNISHAL GROSS, Deputy Commissioner Division of Economic and Financial Opportunity at New York City Department of Small Business Services

QUAMID FRANCIS, Deputy Commissioner and Chief of Staff at the New York City Department of Veterans Services

PETER C. DEL-DEBBIO, State and National, National Security Committee member

LT. COL. RON WATSON, 22 year veteran, retired, Marine Corp

GENE DEFRANCIS, Veteran, First Vice Commander of the American Legion in the Bronx

DAVE CHIARO, Commander, USN, retired

PETER KEMPNER, Legal Director of Volunteers of Legal Services (VOLS)

ROBERT PIECHOTA, from Small Business Administration

2 JOHANNA M. CASTRO: Go live.

3 SGT. MARTINEZ: Just checking the live
4 stream. The live stream looks good. Sergeants if
5 you would start your recordings.

6 SGT. JONES: The cloud has started.

7 SGT. MARTINEZ: Okay.

8 SGT. PEREZ: Backup recording is rolling.

9 SGT. MARTINEZ: Pardon me with that.

10 Okay. Good morning, rather good afternoon and
11 welcome to today's remote New York City Council Joint
12 Hearing of the Committees on Veterans and the
13 Committee on Small Business. At this time would all
14 panelists turn on their video? To minimize
15 disruption, please silence your electronic devices.
16 And if you wish to submit testimony you may do so via
17 email at the following address

18 testimony@Council.NYC.gov. Once again that's

19 testimony@Council.NYC.gov. Thank you very much for
20 your cooperation, we are ready to begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Good morning.

22 I'm Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair of the New
23 York City Council's Committee on Veterans. We're
24 joined today by the Committee on Small Business
25 chaired by my colleague, Council Member Mark Gjonaj.

1
2 I'd like to first acknowledge we've been joined by
3 Council Member Brooks-Powers. I don't see any other
4 Council Members yet. Um, so I want to thank you all
5 for attending today's joint hearing with the
6 Committee on Small Business to discuss City Services
7 to support Veteran entrepreneurs. I also want to
8 give a warm welcome to our service members, veterans
9 and military families who have joined us today.
10 Veterans have a long history of returning home from
11 their service and starting this own business. Since
12 post-World War II, veterans have engaged in
13 entrepreneurial activity at higher rates than
14 civilians. However, rates of veteran
15 entrepreneurialship have been declining. In 2018,
16 11% of veterans were entrepreneurs down from 15% in
17 2005. Recent research by Syracuse University
18 Institute for Veterans and Military Families suggests
19 some barriers may be acute, more and more difficult
20 to overcome for veterans. Some challenges faced by
21 perspective veteran business owners including
22 difficulty accessing capital, struggling to navigate
23 resources and a lack of assistance from medical and
24 disability service providers. There's a clear need
25 to ensure veteran entrepreneurs have access to

1 training, mentors and financial education. In 2015,
2 the administration issued a report entitled a roadmap
3 for supporting veteran owned businesses. The report
4 underscored the need to identify, track and improve
5 outreach to increase participation of veteran owned
6 businesses in city procurement. The City should act
7 as a centralized point of contact to connect veterans
8 with the resources necessary to ensure that their
9 businesses succeed. However, City services can only
10 be utilized if DBS and SBS collaborate to market
11 their services to the veteran community. The 2015
12 report issued seven recommendations to help veterans
13 grow their business and compete for city contracts.
14 One of our votes today is to evaluate the progress
15 the administration has made on implementing these
16 concrete recommendations. The City must work with
17 stakeholders to give Veteran business owners every
18 opportunity to thrive. Our hope is that this hearing
19 will help enhance public understanding of available
20 programs and break down the barriers to veteran
21 entrepreneurship. But I want to thank the Veterans
22 Committee Staff for their help in putting this
23 hearing together. Committee Council Bianca Vitale,
24 Policy Analyst Elizabeth Arts, Senior Finance Analyst
25

1 Sebastian Bachi as well as my staff, my Chief of
2 Staff Jenna Klaus, Legislative Director Mike Corbit,
3 and my scheduler Sabrina Kendall. I will now turn it
4 over to Chair Gjonaj.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you Chair
7 Dinowitz. Good afternoon, I am Council Member Mark
8 Gjonaj, Chair of the Committee on Small Business and
9 I would like to welcome you to our joint oversight
10 hearing with the Committee on Veterans chaired by my
11 dear friend, Council Member Dinowitz. My second
12 favorite Dinowitz in the world. Our goal today is to
13 conduct oversight on the Administration's effort to
14 boost Veteran entrepreneurship to understand the
15 success and challenges of these efforts and to hear
16 from stakeholders about the steps the next
17 Administration can take to better serve our veteran-
18 owned businesses. After returning from service,
19 veterans can deal with a number of challenges from
20 difficulties finding employment and re-integrating
21 into civilian culture to dealing with service-related
22 disabilities or disorders such as chronic pain or
23 PTSD. Veteran entrepreneurs can also face unique
24 barriers to starting a business. Respective veteran
25 business owners may struggle to access capital and

1
2 navigate available resources. A 2020 study conducted
3 by the Syracuse University Institute for Veteran
4 Military Families concerning veteran entrepreneurship
5 found that 33% of the respondents could not afford
6 the long-term capital to start a business. I fear
7 that the financial devastation caused by the pandemic
8 on small businesses has further exacerbated these
9 barriers that veteran entrepreneurs can face. If
10 veteran-owned businesses have difficulty in normal
11 times navigating available resources and accessing
12 capital it may have been extremely challenging for
13 veteran businesses to access the various City, State
14 and Federal financial elite programs during the
15 pandemic. I am confident DVS and SBS were aware that
16 the unique challenges veteran entrepreneurs face
17 become more acute during the pandemic and I look
18 forward to hearing from the Administration on the
19 steps it took to support these patriotic Americans.
20 SBS and DVS do have a number of programs that assist
21 veteran entrepreneurs. SBS offers a boot camp of
22 Veterans that help veterans apply skills they
23 developed in the military to building a successful
24 and profitable business. DVS and SBS encourage
25 applicable veteran business owners to certify their

1
2 businesses by applying to the emerging business
3 enterprise or EBE program or the Minority Women owned
4 Business Enterprise MWBE program. A certified
5 business have greater access to contracting
6 opportunities with City Agencies. Entrepreneurial
7 veterans that use DVS Vets Connect NYC can also be
8 connected to a DVS Care Coordinator that can help
9 Veteran New Yorkers apply to find the, funding
10 opportunities and training programs at the State and
11 Federal level while appreciate the Administration is
12 addressing unique concerns Veteran New Yorkers face
13 in owning and operating a small business. The
14 purpose of our oversight hearing today is to
15 understand how productive these program are in
16 addressing Veteran concerns and whether they are
17 sufficient. How many veterans participate in the SBS
18 Veteran focused Business Boot Camp. How many
19 veterans does SBS administer annually? How many boot
20 camp programs? Does SBS and DVS help businesses
21 register as EBE or WMBE? How many veterans are
22 calling Vet Connect NYC for help with finding
23 opportunities? We are aware that navigating
24 available resources can be challenging for veteran
25 New Yorkers. I want to be sure that the veterans are

1 aware and using these resources that the
2 Administration provides. We will hear this afternoon
3 from stakeholders about their perspective on the
4 Administration's effort to boost veteran
5 entrepreneurship. As this Legislative session will
6 be ending soon, I look forward to engaging with
7 advocates and what programs the next Administration
8 should continue and areas of improvement that would
9 be implemented to better serve our veteran
10 entrepreneurs. While we can never truly thank our
11 veterans for risking their lives to serve our country
12 it is the government's duty to ensure veterans are
13 able to readjust to civilian life and contribute to
14 society. I further add the country should be judged,
15 in this case, New York City should be judged on how
16 it treats and the support that it offers its
17 veterans. With that being said, I'd like to thank my
18 Legislative Director Austin Sackler, our Legislative
19 Counsel Stephanie Jones and Policy Analyst Noah
20 Meister and Financial Analyst Alia Ali for their hard
21 work in preparing for this meeting. I turn it back
22 to the Counsel.
23

24 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you
25 Chair Gjonaj. Um, we're going to turn it over to

1
2 Committee Counsel Bianca Vitale to go over some
3 procedural items.

4 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
5 you Chair, my name is Bianca Vitale and I'm Committee
6 Counsel to the Committee on Veterans for the New York
7 City Council. Before we begin, I want to remind
8 everyone that you will be on mute until you are
9 called on to testify when you will be unmuted by the
10 host. I will be calling on panelists to testify.
11 Please listen for your name to be called. I will be
12 periodically announcing who the next panelist will
13 be. For everyone testifying today please note that
14 there may be a few seconds of delay before you are
15 unmuted and we thank you in advance for your
16 patience. All hearing participants should submit
17 written testimony to testimony@Council.NYC.gov. At
18 today's hearing, the first panelist to give testimony
19 will be representatives from the administration
20 followed by Council Member questions and then members
21 of the public will have an opportunity to testify.
22 Council Members who have questions for a particular
23 panelist should use the Raise Hand Function in Zoom
24 and I will call on you after the panelist has
25 completed their testimony. I will now call on

1
2 members of the Administration to testify. Testimony
3 will be provided by James Hendon, Commissioner of the
4 New York City Department of Veteran Services. In
5 addition, the following members of the Administration
6 will be available for questioning for Committee
7 questions. Dynishal Gross, Deputy Commissioner
8 Division of Economic and Financial Opportunity at the
9 New York City Department of Small Business Services,
10 in addition to Quamid Francis, Deputy Commissioner
11 and Chief of Staff at the New York City Department of
12 Veteran Services. Before we begin, I will administer
13 the oath. I will call on each of you individually
14 for a response. Please raise your right hand? Okay.
15 Will just the Administration raise their right hand,
16 Commissioner Hendon, do you affirm to tell the truth,
17 the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your
18 testimony before this Committee and to respond
19 honestly to Council Member questions?

20 JAMES HENDON: I do.

21 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy
22 Commissioner Francis? Hold on one second, you're on
23 mute. Can you say that again for the record?

24 QUAMID FRANCIS: I do.
25

1
2 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
3 you. Also Deputy Commissioner Gross?

4 DYNISHAL GROSS: I do.

5 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL:
6 Awesome. Thank you so much. Uh, Commissioner Hendon
7 you may begin when you're ready.

8 JAMES HENDON: Thank you so much. Uh,
9 first off, good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, Chair
10 Gjonaj, Committee Members also Council Member Brooks-
11 Powers and, and advocates. My name is James Hendon
12 and I'm proud to serve as the Commissioner for the
13 New York City Department of Veteran Services, or DVS,
14 joined by DVS Deputy Commissioner, Quamid Francis who
15 oversees agency-wide operations and New York City
16 Small Business Services, Deputy Commissioner Dynishal
17 Gross who oversees the Division of Economic and
18 Finance Opportunity at SBS. I welcome this
19 opportunity to testify about entrepreneurialship
20 resources and services for Veteran Small Business
21 Owners. You know, according to the University of
22 Syracuse and J.P. Morgan report titled the State of
23 Veteran Entrepreneurialship, what we know and next
24 steps. Veteran entrepreneurialship dropped by 33%
25 over the last 20 years. The strong reason to believe

1 this drastic decline was caused by many variables,
2 however, DVS believes the major causes for this
3 decrease were a result of three key factors. First,
4 being New York Employers and major corporate
5 initiatives around the nation targeted improvements
6 to the unemployment rate for young Veterans led to an
7 incredible amount of employment opportunities in the
8 private sector for transitioning servicemen.
9 Secondly, our partners at the Institute for Veterans
10 and Military Families share at 75% of veteran
11 entrepreneurs reported encounter challenges with
12 starting and growing the business with the most
13 common challenge being social, capital, in the form
14 of networks and mentorships. Lastly, Veterans face
15 greater difficulty accessing capital relative to non-
16 Veterans. According to the Federal Reserve Banks,
17 small business credit survey, Veteran owned
18 businesses were less likely to be deemed low credit
19 risks and more likely to be deemed medium credit
20 risks. This can be due to frequent moves and
21 overseas travel associated with military life.
22 Veterans may have a harder time building a credit
23 score and history relative to non-veterans.
24 According to the small business credit survey, a
25

1
2 greater share of greater owned businesses sought
3 loans of \$100,000 or less. One explanation for lower
4 approval rates among veterans to be a mis-match in
5 the lender from which the financing was sought. To
6 address the needs outlined in the report referenced
7 above and the report completed by our partners at the
8 New York City Department of Small Business Services,
9 titled A Roadmap for Supporting Veteran Owned
10 Businesses. DVS partnered with the institute for
11 veterans and military families, coalition of veteran
12 owned businesses and First Data Center of Excellent
13 for Veteran entrepreneurship to host the DVS best
14 source of Vet at Google Grow with Google Learning
15 Center in October of 2019. Vet stores brought
16 veteran and military spouse entrepreneurs together
17 with procurement executives from some of the largest
18 companies around the country for a day of
19 procurement, focused panel discussions, networking,
20 resource connections and break-out sessions. This
21 event helped veteran and military spouse owned
22 businesses gain valuable resources, information and
23 best practices around corporate, supply, diversity
24 and both private and public procurement readiness to
25 help them grow their companies and find supply

1
2 opportunities. Panel participants and guest speakers
3 for the procurement in the public and private sectors
4 discussion included the global head of supply
5 diversity and inclusion from Google that the City
6 University of New York's Director Supply, Diversity,
7 AT&T Supple Diversity Manager, Johnston & Johnston's
8 Senior Manager of Acquisition and Investors, Turner
9 Construction's Procurement Manager and speakers from
10 the Mayor's Office of Contract Services the Mayor's
11 Office of MDVE. In addition to the panelists, Vet
12 Source organized break-out sessions for veteran
13 business owners to engage directly with public and
14 private sector representatives from New York State's
15 Office of General Services, the New York City Small
16 Business Solution Centers, Walmart, Pfizer,
17 Salesforce, Signature Bank, Greenway USA and the
18 Excelsior Growth Fund, a local community development
19 financial institution. In addition to Vet Sources,
20 DVS connects veteran business owners with a variety
21 of needs through our robust Vet Connect network or
22 Vet Bis NYC Map and our DVS website. The DVS website
23 provides information on over 40 different programs
24 and resources ranging from starting a small business,
25 training programs, business mentorship and

1 networking, certifications, business re-opening,
2 grants and loans, legal services, Federal Relief,
3 COVID-19 relief and more. DVS's interactive online
4 map known as Vet Biz NYC allows Veteran Entrepreneurs
5 to promote their businesses and encourage the public
6 to shop local and support our Veteran owned
7 businesses. Our map is currently home to 300 Veteran
8 owned business from 29 different categories
9 throughout the five boroughs. Lastly, our core team
10 of care coordinators utilize Vet Connect NYC to
11 connect Veteran entrepreneurships to over 15
12 organizations that provide 20 unique programs that
13 offer a range of resources including access to
14 capital, market, development business planning and
15 more. In conclusion, we thank you for the
16 opportunity to testify on this matter and look
17 forward to any questions that you or the Committee
18 Members may have.

19
20 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
21 you Commission Hendon, I will now turn it over to
22 questions from Chair Dinowitz, followed by questions
23 from Chair Gjonaj. Panelists please stay unmuted if
24 possible during this question and answer period.
25 Thank you. Chair Dinowitz, please begin.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you and
3 before I begin I just want to acknowledge Council
4 Member Vallone has joined us at the hearing.

5 Commissioner you just mentioned the number of
6 businesses that appear on the map but how many, does
7 that include every veteran owned business in New York
8 City and if now how many Veteran owned businesses are
9 there in New York City?

10 JAMES HENDON: Good question. No, it's,
11 we've got an estimate of the veteran owned businesses
12 in New York City, the estimate account is 953 in New
13 York City. So, five boroughs, estimate is 953. That
14 number comes from looking at the State's Directory of
15 Service of Veteran owned businesses. We look at the
16 state's directory and we say let's look at all the,
17 it turns out there are as of an hour ago, there are
18 152 certified and state, 142 services of disabled
19 veteran owned businesses in the 5 boroughs, 142. The
20 disability rate for our veterans in this city is
21 14.9% so doing that math if you take the 142 and
22 divide by 14.95 you get 953. So our estimate for how
23 many DOVs are in the five boroughs is 953. We have
24 300 listed on the map, chair.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Okay. And
3 the, the, so, the, so the solid data that you have is
4 the 142 from.

5 JAMES HENDON: It's the 300, the solid,
6 the solid is the 300. 300 is the solid data, the
7 estimate is, yeah, the estimate is 953 total citywide
8 but right now it's 300 that are on the Map, which is
9 NYC.gov/vetbiznyc.

10 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: I see. And
11 what are the principal industries of New York City's
12 Veteran owned businesses?

13 JAMES HENDON: With the, right now, the
14 best answer I can give is by look at the SDVOB
15 directory, the 142 is the best one that we can use to
16 intuitive it because we have businesses still
17 updating their information that were not SDVOBs that
18 are on that map. And so when we look at it, the top
19 ticket for us has been consulting and other services
20 as far as the of those SDVOBs, 74 out of 142 are in
21 the field of consulting and other services, um, and
22 then after that we get into the space of construction
23 which accounts for, 22 of the businesses are in the
24 construction space. We've got to get back with you
25 with other numbers Mr. Chair, but to be clear, the

1
2 best proxy for us is look at the 142 SDVOBs because
3 we have all the information. We're still getting
4 more information updated in real time by all of our
5 businesses. They are using a map that is not SDVOBs.

6 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Right so.

7 If, if a business reaches out to SBS for support,
8 does SBS, are they asking the agency, or sorry, does
9 the agency ask if the business is veteran owned to
10 better identify those supports and get a better sense
11 of the data, right? So, we're not so much estimating
12 how many businesses but we would have solid data on
13 that?

14 JAMES HENDON: I'm going to defer to, to
15 you know, my colleagues as far as Deputy Commissioner
16 Gross from SBS and to Deputy Commissioner Francis
17 from DVS about it. I'll start by saying this is
18 currently within passport that, any veteran, any
19 business owner who's bending with the City has a
20 place where they can self-identify as a veteran when
21 they are signing up within passport which is how, you
22 know, vending and how, you know, monetary exchanges
23 occur between the government and businesses. So,
24 when we look at passport, the most recent count we
25 have as far from the our friends at the Mayor's

1
2 Office of Contract Services that 375 businesses have
3 identified at some point in passport as being
4 veteran owned.

5 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Now just,
6 just because this was the area a few months ago.
7 When we say veteran, is it clear that it's veteran or
8 current service member, because I'm looking at the
9 Work Force One, part of the Work Force One Website,
10 um, and I'm trying to see if I can see the language
11 properly which is served it asks if any of these
12 apply to you, it's served in the U.S. Armed Forces,
13 National Guard or Reserve and one of the things you,
14 um, testified on a few months ago is that in New York
15 City one of the great things about New York City is
16 that it doesn't matter whether you serve or have
17 served in the Armed Forces you are, you are treated
18 with the same dignity, respect and city services.
19 And so, in doing that work, is that part of passport
20 to ensure that a veteran whether they are currently
21 serving in the reserves or they have served in the
22 reserves, um, are identify, or have the ability to
23 identify that way?

24 JAMES HENDON: I'm going to defer to
25 Deputy Commissioner Gross on this one.

1
2 DYNISHAL GROSS: So, in terms of the
3 information we collect on service is not restricted
4 to veterans that have concluded their service, we're
5 asking in our universal business profile to sign up
6 for any SBS programs and in our workforce intake
7 programs and in our intake programs for, uh, in our
8 intake forms for our procurement technical assistance
9 center, um, them to self-identify as having had a
10 history of service, whether that is ongoing or has
11 concluded.

12 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Okay. Okay,
13 I haven't, I haven't seen the passport form. So, I
14 guess, I'm so that's, that's good if it is clear and
15 explicit that, um, you know, to veterans and current
16 service members, um, that, that identity is for
17 anyone currently serving or who has served. Because
18 again on this, access and I always see that the
19 gov/eligibility for the workforce one program, I
20 guess or access that would take you to workforce one,
21 it's uses served in the past tense and Commissioner I
22 know that's an issue we've been, you and I have been
23 trying to talk about and, and address and it's not
24 only past service members, it's current service
25 members, that's what our City provides, right? Um,

1
2 so veterans you know face unique barriers to owning
3 and operating business, so can you describe in more
4 detail the programs the administration has
5 implemented to actually address the challenges, so it
6 sounds like you're starting to collect some
7 information. What are the programs that the
8 Administration has implemented to help our veterans
9 and service members?

10 JAMES HENDON: I think for us a lot of
11 it, and I'll begin this and I'll defer also to Deputy
12 Commissioner Gross, Deputy Commissioner Francis to
13 add on. Uh, a lot of this has been getting the word
14 out to veterans about being certified with the City.
15 So, if we look at the audience where we have only
16 about 953, we're trying to identify as many of them
17 as possible, we know 300 of them, a lot of it is
18 making sure that, that those 300 plus really or as
19 many of them as possible know here's what's out there
20 to you as far as dealing with what the city's
21 offerings are, be it dealing with the City's
22 procurement technical assistance centers, be it
23 dealing with the City's small business solution
24 centers. Be it, you know, how do I sign up if I want
25 to become certified as an MWBE or as an emergent

1
2 business enterprise or an LBE? And so a lot of it
3 has been, we've held various webinar trainings in
4 parallel with our friends at SBS to get the word out
5 to our veterans on what's out there to try to bring
6 them in to what currently exists as far as services.
7 And I just want to add that there's so much in this I
8 want to make sure I'm not missing things. I want to
9 make sure that Deputy Commissioner Francis and Gross
10 can chime in as well.

11 QUAMID FRANCIS: Yeah. I'll just sort of
12 add to what you said Commissioner. Um, so yeah,
13 we've definitely been working with, um, certainly
14 Deputy Commissioner Gross here, um, over these past
15 18 months you're in a pandemic, very closely, but you
16 know, what we've been trying to focus on, you know,
17 while balancing the different, uh, hierarchy of needs
18 that the, you know the rest and effects that the
19 pandemic presented, whether that's food, insecurity,
20 health and mental health in the veteran community,
21 you know, we wanted to focus on trying to better
22 understand the veteran owned business and better
23 entrepreneurial landscape in the city, um, and so as
24 the Commissioner kind of mentioned and/or eluded to,
25 some of the collaborative efforts that we've achieved

1
2 with SBS is that veteran owned business map which is
3 a huge deal, uh, for us because that gives us an
4 opportunity to begin to assess the data of the
5 different types of industries and the different types
6 of services a lot of those veteran owned businesses
7 and entrepreneurs require. And so we're hoping, um,
8 that, you know in a short amount of time that we were
9 looking to produce, um, you know, and on-board those
10 300 different businesses on to our map that we can
11 begin to develop better relationships with them and
12 hopefully in the future begin to convene them to
13 really sort of tease out a lot of the different, um,
14 points of friction, um, to help, you now better
15 connected to those resources. The Commissioner
16 alluded to earlier as well as in his testimony, um,
17 that we created the alias NYC.gov/vetbusiness as a
18 way to sort of, um, create a centralized location
19 where veteran owned businesses and entrepreneurs can
20 access those resources. I think one of the things
21 that we all can agree on is that there are a myriad
22 of resources that are available to all New Yorkers
23 alike but a lot of the issue is take up and so by us
24 creating that alias and centralizing those resources
25 for those veteran owned businesses, it allows them to

1
2 go to one location to be able to access those
3 resources. And, you know, some of the other things
4 that we're looking at doing hopefully in the future
5 as I said is convening all those different veteran
6 businesses, utilizing the data that we capture from
7 veterans able to be, to self-identify in the passport
8 programs and access city contracts and to utilize all
9 that data, amalgamate it and really begin to, they
10 don't understand the landscape so that's the work
11 that we are continuing to do, um, in collaboration
12 with SBS, certainly with Deputy Commissioner Gross.
13 And so, I'll hand it over to you Deputy Commissioner
14 if you wanted to add anything on that but we've done
15 a lot of meaningful work and, and I think the
16 collaboration has been very strong, um, especially
17 within these past two years.

18 DYNISHAL GROSS: Yeah. Um, no argument
19 there. DVS is a critical partner for SBS. We've
20 worked very closely together during the pandemic.
21 Um, you know no end in sight for that. We have, of
22 course promoted our certification programs and our
23 procurement, technical assistance programs, generally
24 and specifically to the veteran community. We've
25 worked hard to cross certify veteran owned businesses

1 that have been certified by the state, as service
2 disabled veterans to bring them into our city
3 certification programs, work to ensure that all of
4 those businesses are aware of city contracting
5 opportunities, state registrations, federal
6 registrations, that can help their businesses grow
7 and survive the pandemic through government
8 contracting. In addition, veterans are very much a
9 part of our business education programming, our
10 technical assistance programming and our financing
11 assistance programs, so we have done our best to
12 make, make all of those services, um available to
13 veterans to increase awareness of those services
14 through partnership with DVS and the community, um,
15 based organizations that are focused on this veterans
16 community.

17
18 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Um, before I
19 ask my next question.

20 JAMES HENDON: If I could. If I could
21 just.

22 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Hold on
23 Commissioner, I just want to acknowledge that we've
24 been joined by Council Member Ampry-Samuel. All
25 right, Commissioner Hendon, please continue.

1
2 JAMES HENDON: You know, I got to start
3 just by also acknowledging Council Member Vallone and
4 Council Member Ampry-Samuel who are here just to
5 recognize them too. Now, just back to this, back the
6 questioning, I, um, we, we've held bi-weekly check-
7 ins between Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner Gross'
8 staff and our staff, you know for the better part of
9 more than year. Really from last summer, up through
10 just this past fall and so we've been. There's so
11 many things to say here. Um, beyond what we've been
12 doing within the Administration, we've also tried to
13 make one plus one equal three as far as really
14 enacting and trying to, you know, I don't want to
15 say, to, to leverage our partners in this space
16 throughout the region. Just to name a few, you've
17 got the Bunker Labs Network, you've got the Defense
18 Entrepreneurs Form, the National Security Innovation
19 Network, the New York State Veterans Chamber of
20 Commerce, New York Veteran Owned Business
21 Association, NYU Veterans Future Lab, the Small
22 Business Administration, the SBDC or Small Business
23 Development Corporation, Veteran Business Outreach
24 Centers and then as far as other adjacent partners
25 between us, SBS and the New York State's Office of

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2 General Services, the SVDOB division and then
3 separate P-TAC as far as LaGuardia Community Colleges
4 P-Tac along with the SBS P-Tac the Procurement
5 Technical Assistance Centers. We got to a place
6 where we were sending information out to what came to
7 15 different network partners who are aggregates of
8 veteran entrepreneurs every few weeks to keep pushing
9 things out to people to make sure that they knew what
10 we've got going on as far as beyond the
11 Administration, things that we've done to try to
12 leverage our friends. And then I want go back to
13 another question, the count as far as what industries
14 are veterans going in to, just based on looking at
15 the SVDOB data, we know the highest number is 74 out
16 of those 142 served as disabled veteran owned
17 businesses are in consulting. We know that's 25 are
18 in the commodity space, 25 things like food and
19 beverage, printing, logistics, and that like and then
20 another 22 are in construction. So those top three
21 fields, consulting, commodities and then
22 construction. I just want to clarify that real
23 quick.

24 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you.

25 Um, I have two, you know, two more main points. One

1 is you've been speaking a lot about outreach, you
2 know, reaching out to our vets. Um, how would you
3 gauge the success of your outreach efforts and what
4 barriers exist right now to, to reaching to vets and
5 making sure that they know, uh, certain programs
6 exist? If we set the table by saying we estimated
7 953 veteran owned businesses in the five boroughs.
8 So 953 in the five boroughs and we know 300 of them.
9 I would argue that it was some of the barriers are to
10 engage those veterans in that group of the 653 to go
11 find them and they often times not interact in
12 veterans circle. It's been kind of the same thing on
13 other issues in the veteran space. We are to get
14 that new veteran under the umbrella it may require us
15 to go in to an area that we are not going into
16 normally. It's not that that person is going into
17 the typical American Legion or the Veterans of
18 Foreign Wars meeting or to whatever network of
19 veterans they be tied to another group. So for us
20 it's breaking through to really non-veteran entities
21 to be able to identify our people. I'd argue that
22 that's one piece of it for us as far as expanding
23 whom we are doing outreach to. Another barrier which
24 kind of transcends us, we have to speak to it, we
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1
2 have, we still have many veterans who do not self-
3 identify and we are talking about this in the
4 business context but we could speak to this in other
5 context also, Mr. Chair, in that I don't want
6 anything special. I don't want any special
7 treatment, any additional attention, I don't want it,
8 you know, I don't want anybody to look at me any
9 different, you know, from the other person so you've
10 got to deal with that also. So, I fear that we may
11 never get a handle on all 953. Um, you know, I'd
12 argue another piece of this too on the outreach side
13 and I'm going to defer to Deputy Commissioner Francis
14 and Deputy Commissioner Gross to add to this, is to
15 do it in the smartest way possible in this era of
16 COVID where you have people who are changed how
17 they've operated and how they have worked in general
18 and this crosses verticals for us on the veterans
19 side as far as how do we conduct outreach in a new
20 normal way. you may have a business who says look
21 I'm going to try to set something up where it's very
22 completely virtual so I may not be the person that
23 you'll at an in person gathering or I'm someone who
24 is approaching it from the perspective of I've left
25 my W-2 job. I want to start my own thing and I don't

1 know where to begin and we need to find that person
2 as well because that's person's made an entire life
3 shift and how do we identify them in this new
4 landscape and so there's a lot more to add to this as
5 far as barriers to outreach, that's just a few but
6 I'm happy to defer to Deputy Commissioner Francis and
7 D.C. Gross, anything to add there.

9 QUAMID FRANCIS: Yeah, I think the only
10 thing I'll add to what you've said Commissioner is
11 I'll talk about some of the, quickly about the
12 proactive work that we're doing with respect to
13 outreach, so a huge issue that we all understand,
14 very critically is the issue of connecting, bridging
15 that return from active service into the civilian
16 sector. And so we're, partnering in and we are
17 working closely with the DOD, the VA in addition to
18 the National Association for State Association for
19 Veteran Affairs and New York State Division of
20 Veteran Services to get a better handle on who are
21 those transitioning veterans, active duty service
22 members, who they are and, and, uh, where they're
23 coming to our City across the five boroughs. So,
24 we're getting a really. We're very close in making
25 huge in rows and being able to access that data so

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2 that way before they even get to New York we can be
3 able to do outreach to them, targeted outreach to
4 them, wherever they are, the military basis to be
5 able to give them the resources to ensure that they
6 know what they are, they know we are as an agency and
7 the myriad of different resources that are available
8 to do. So, that's some of the proactive work that
9 we're doing and I think that'll help with ensuring
10 that they know all the universe of resources that are
11 available to them. So I just wanted to talk about
12 that proactive work which is huge for us to be able
13 to access the DD214s and which is the military record
14 of service of those transitioning members before they
15 even get to New York is really critical for us to
16 help us to do the essential outreach that is needed
17 in connection to services. And, I don't know if the
18 Deputy C. Gross wanted to add anything to that?

19 DYNISHAL GROSS: Um, I would just add
20 perhaps that, you know we've tried to make marketing
21 investments that are responsive to the moment that
22 we're in and one of the most effective has been
23 investing in Google search advertising so that when,
24 you know, when someone puts a search into a web
25 engine they are seeking a certain set of information,

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2 the free resources provided by the City are some of
3 the first hits they receive. So, meeting that moment
4 of need and inquiry with on point resource that's
5 provided by their tax dollars is a great way of
6 spreading the word about our programs because it's
7 impossible you know to create a broad a knowing as we
8 want at every moment and so investing in, in
9 advertising through technology that can meet folks at
10 that moment of need has been very important for us,
11 in addition, of course to all of the work with
12 partners that Commissioner Hendon described.

13 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: So, and, this
14 will be my kind of last question before I turn it
15 over to Chair Gjonaj, but when you spoke before, D.C.
16 Gross about bringing veterans into existing programs,
17 um, you know Chair Gjonaj and I both in our opening
18 statements and then of course we all recognize that
19 veteran's face, you know, other significant
20 challenges. Um, so can you talk a little bit more
21 about what it's like bringing the veterans into
22 existing programs and if those existing programs
23 actually address the needs that we're talking about
24 those needs seem to still exist even with all the
25 programs, um, that this City is providing.

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DYNISHAL GROSS: I, um, so certainly in our certification programs we recognize that any firm coming into our certification programs, that those programs exist because those firms have been historically excluded from procurement opportunities and capacity building one on one technical assistance, intensive technical assistance are part of the design of those programs. We're not expecting that business owners are going to, you know, jump, into you know procurement with a City as large and complex as New York City without those supports and so, you know, we're...

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Hold on for a second and I don't mean to ... I just want to get a clarity on this.

DYNISHAL GROSS: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: So, for example, if a, if a veteran owned business and then they self-identify on passport as a veteran owned or a service member owned business do they get some sort of priority do they jump to the top of the list? Do they get a phone call from DVS? Are they prioritized in any way knowing that there is a specific need with our veteran community?

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DYNISHAL GROSS: Um, I'll leave it to Commissioner Hendon to speak about how DVS may reach out to the veterans on that passport list, um, for our part, we are reaching out to those self-identified veterans to invite them to apply for our certification programs if they're eligible or to participate in our procurement technical assistance center services if they are not eligible or ready for certification. So, we're explaining to them all of those services and inviting them to partake.

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: But, Commissioner Hendon, before you go, I guess is part of my question is are those, is that outreach for these programs any different than what you'd otherwise do for any, any business or any, any business on passport? Is there anything different or unique that veterans receive?

DYNISHAL GROSS: So, we reach out to the self-identified categories in passport which are all business registering in passport. We have self-identified veterans, self-identified worker coop owned businesses, LGBTQ owned businesses, and self-identified MWBEs and so we're reaching out to the registrants and passports in those categories with

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2 messaging and, you know, description of services that
3 relates to our understanding of needs that are common
4 to those groups. However, you know, also recognizing
5 that every business is different and we are learning
6 from them what their needs are.

7 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: We are going
8 to hand off to Commissioner Hendon or if you wanted
9 to add anything?

10 JAMES HENDON: So for us would be the,
11 uh, with the 375 who identified as veterans who are
12 in passport, we do perform outreach to those, those
13 veteran owned businesses as far as making sure they
14 are aware of the different city certifications and to
15 take advantage of all that is around them as far as
16 the resources that we provide and that we connect
17 folks to. Um, and we also tell them to tie-in with
18 nyc.gov/vetbusiness which having looked at every
19 single state's Department of Veteran's Services
20 webpage, I can tell you we have more on
21 NYC.Gov/vetbusiness for veteran entrepreneurs that
22 even, than any state, um, and so we make sure to
23 reach out to those veterans as far as that form of
24 outreach.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you. I
3 want to turn it over the Chair Gjonaj for his
4 questions at this point. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you Chair
6 Dinowitz and thank you for those great questions that
7 I want to thank the Commissioner and Deputy
8 Commissioner for answer them. Um, Commissioner
9 Hendon, do we know the number of veterans that call
10 New York City home? What is the accepted number?

11 JAMES HENDON: Accepted number, Mr. Chair
12 is 210,808.

13 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: 210.

14 JAMES HENDON: 808.

15 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: 808. So,
16 210,808?

17 JAMES HENDON: That's correct and that
18 number includes those who are still serving and those
19 who, I still serve for instance, I'm in that number
20 and those who no longer serve. I'm a numbers person
21 and I'm just looking at, and I believe SBS will
22 correct me if I'm wrong here but the accepted number
23 of small businesses, uh, that call New York City home
24 or based in New York City is roughly 240,000, is that
25 correct deputy commissioner?

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2 DYNISHAL GROSS: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Based on the
4 numbers that you had just given us, Commissioner
5 Hendon, using 953 veteran owned business of which
6 only 300 participate in your map that puts it roughly
7 at 0.15% of veteran businesses compared to all small
8 businesses in New York City. Now these veterans and
9 I say this because I have the, the pleasure of
10 probably having more post and American Legions than
11 anyone else in the City of New York in their Council
12 District. I believe I have seven and I'm sure
13 someone will correct me if that number is higher,
14 that represent, Peter is saying much higher, so I'll
15 wait for Peter's expertise that call the 13th Council
16 District home, representing thousands of veterans and
17 Commissioner I believe you had the privilege and joy
18 of participating at our Veteran's parade recently and
19 you saw the number of veterans and the support that
20 we had in Throgg's Neck for that celebration which
21 was incredible. I just, I'm looking at the numbers
22 and you clearly identify the issues, social, uh,
23 capital and entrepreneurship as being the issues and
24 then deputy commissioner, highlighter that your
25 resources are focused on outreaching, using,

1 advertising in Google. My question is how much money
2 is actually allocated in the SBS budget toward
3 marketing toward veteran business entrepreneurs? Do
4 we have a dollar amount?

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6 DYNISHAL GROSS: I don't have a dollar
7 amount for you today, Chairman Gjonaj. I'm happy to
8 look at that. I think it would be, um, we can look
9 at the spending over the past physical years and
10 share that as an update with the committee.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: That would
12 significant because that would also determine the
13 number of resources that were allocated to this and
14 that would probably underscore why it is a 33%
15 decrease over the last 20 year's and in business
16 entrepreneurs by our veterans according to
17 Commissioner HENDON, is that correct?

18 JAMES HENDON: Yeah, I'd love to jump in
19 when you get a chance, Chair Gjonaj. I would love to
20 jump in.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Absolutely.

22 JAMES HENDON: If it's okay. I like
23 numbers too.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: You can jump in
25 whenever you feel necessary. Go ahead.

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2 JAMES HENDON: Okay, well, um, population
3 New York City 2020 is 8.8 million and, um, you know,
4 we just talked about 240,000 businesses, you know, we
5 just agree that 240,000 businesses for SBS, divide by
6 8,804,190 and I get, um, 0.027 and so I just want to
7 point out that our numbers are still lower when you
8 put it the way you put it, but, um, you know it's
9 still, it's, not too far away, it's far but it's not
10 as far as way as it's made to seem from our non-
11 veteran friends with this. As far as, if we look at
12 it based on population versus businesses. I get
13 0.027 and if we do the same map, you know, and I just
14 wanted to mention that and in the other one. I'm
15 sorry.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: The only factor
17 that you're not considering in that is those that are
18 under the age of 18 that will not have the
19 opportunity to have a business. So, we have, when
20 you look at those numbers of 8.6 that's inclusive of
21 all New Yorkers that reside in New York City and
22 that's a number of people that are below age that
23 wouldn't generally qualify to open a small business
24 or qualified to be employed.

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2 JAMES HENDON: I respect that and since
3 you brought age up, since you mentioned that piece of
4 it, we have to call out the change in demographic of
5 the veteran community. If you look at it ever since
6 the draft ended, July 1, 1973, we no longer had a
7 draft, our population has declined since then because
8 you have, you know an all volunteering force
9 deploying over and over. You've got technology used
10 a lot which service members would use and you have
11 contractors doing a lot of work as well and so when
12 you look at the demographic shifts in our population,
13 um, one of these other reports would be referred to
14 World War II generation had 49.7% of World War II
15 veterans were self-employed at some point, Korean War
16 40% self-employed. When you look at the 9/11
17 generation, it is 4.5% and so when we look at how
18 there's been a shift between, you know, who's going
19 to go into self-employment into W-2, that's also a
20 structural change and these are national numbers when
21 you mention the 33% number, that's not a New York
22 City Piece and so we just want to make sure, we're
23 calling out, you know, I started the testimony by
24 highlighting, this Hiring Our Heros effort is a very
25 real and beneficial thing. It's led to a situation

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2 where many of our veterans are getting approached and
3 engaged well before they even leave service and
4 convinced to go on the W-2 side and so it's just,
5 it's so much deeper. I just want to make sure we are
6 acknowledging the demographic shifts and the way the
7 market on the employment side has shifted and how
8 that impacts entrepreneurship as well. Even in the
9 City it's 17.2% of our veterans are 55 or older and
10 so that could be another piece of this as far as
11 speaking of age people who are moving away from, you
12 know, working in general and then transitioning this
13 younger generation for whom they may not have
14 embraced self-employment in the same way as the
15 people, 20, 30, 40 years before that. Um, just
16 wanted to say that.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you
18 Commissioner. I'm going to go back to the question
19 about how much we allocate in our budget toward
20 outreach and advocacy. Do we have a number of
21 dedicated staff that focus solely on reaching out to
22 veteran entrepreneurs? Do we even have a person,
23 that could be SBS or you commissioner have in your
24 agency? Do you have a specific person that does
25 nothing more than reach out to veteran entrepreneurs

1
2 engaging and educating on the services and reports
3 that are afforded to them?

4 JAMES HENDON: We have someone who has
5 this role but it's not the only thing that she does,
6 so we do have someone who's main piece of this is to
7 coordinate with folks who are running this veteran
8 business map, who coordinate with other leaders in
9 the veteran's space. They are constantly checking
10 with those 15 veteran owned business network leaders
11 to make sure that our message isn't getting filtered
12 out through them, but this person is our director of
13 problems, does have other roles but we do have
14 someone for whom this is a very large part of her
15 portfolio, um, Mr. Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you
17 Commissioner.

18 DYNISHAL GROSS: And has SBS. At SBS we
19 have external affairs teams in every division and
20 they are doing the work of outreaching to their
21 target clients but not specifically for veterans
22 only. Um, they are attempting to reach you know, all
23 of the businesses across the five boroughs,
24 businesses with high need, businesses that conform to
25 the requirements of our programming so minority,

1 women owned, immigrant businesses and businesses the
2 require the support of the city to survive and grow
3 whether that's a physical emergency or the financial
4 challenges of the pandemic. So the way it's staffed,
5 is each division has program staff and external
6 affair staff and then we also have a marketing team
7 that's focused on providing resources to our
8 community based partners, understanding that they are
9 mission driving, they are close to the individuals we
10 are trying to serve but they may be lesser resourced
11 than the city so we're providing information that
12 they can share so that by, by connecting their
13 clients to those city resources they are also
14 achieving their missions. But there's not a veteran
15 specific outreach staff person at SBS.
16

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you
18 Deputy so the reason I asked that questions is to
19 compare it to my own Council District. So, roughly
20 every Council District is 170,000 plus or minus and I
21 can tell you no matter what extent I go to, I could
22 never reach out to every constituent, regardless of
23 what I try and I've got a large staff that focuses on
24 outreach and newsletters, emails, um, text messages,
25 flyers, attending all meetings within the community

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2 whether they be community board, civic groups or
3 other organizations always promoting what the
4 services that we offer and we can never get the word
5 out entirely. So, here you have 210,000 which is
6 significantly larger than a Council District and I
7 just explained what, what efforts we go through that
8 focus specifically on outreach and we can never get
9 into every household, every neighborhood, every
10 street. I hope that we will start looking at this in
11 a different fashion. If the objective is to reach
12 out to all of these veterans, you don't have a
13 committed staff doing so, you'll never reach out to
14 them and we'll hear from some of the panelists which
15 I hope both the Commissioners and Deputies will stay
16 on to hear from them. I'm sure they've never heard
17 of these programs before and these are actively
18 engaged veterans that operate out of posts, American
19 Legions and POW has a City-wide title and I'm sure
20 he'll share with you that he hasn't heard about this
21 or is aware of these programs, he can assure you that
22 veterans that he encounters day in and day out have
23 not. Mention, Deputy Commissioners that
24 certification program of eligible businesses. Can
25 you further elaborate on that?

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2 DYNISHAL GROSS: The City has three
3 certification programs that are designed to support
4 businesses and contracting with the City of New York
5 and diversify the City's vendor pools. The largest
6 program is our MWBE program. That program certifies
7 businesses that are majority owned, operated and
8 controlled by individuals who are African American,
9 Hispanic, Asian American, Native American or women of
10 all races and then we have an emerging business
11 enterprise program. That program certifies
12 businesses owned by majority, owned, operated and
13 controlled by individuals are from groups that have
14 been socially disadvantaged historically, an American
15 Society and also experienced economic disadvantages
16 that relate to the social categories that they are
17 part of but it's race and gender neutral and then we
18 have an LBE program for smaller construction firms as
19 well that operate in areas of the City that are
20 economically disadvantaged or employ economically
21 disadvantaged individuals. So, those are the three
22 certification programs and veterans depending on
23 their ethnicity and gender and also their, their
24 history and business may qualify for any of those
25 certification programs.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: But I think
3 those three apply to any New Yorkers. There's, it's
4 not specifically the word veteran is not used in any
5 one of those programs.

6 DYNISHAL GROSS: No. Those programs are
7 based on the criteria that I, that I outlined,
8 ethnicity, gender, for LBE the business type and for
9 the EBE the social disadvantage of the majority
10 owners and their, their experiences having
11 encountered some economic disadvantage due to their
12 social characteristics.

13 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: So, if I was a
14 veteran that did not fall under any of those
15 categories, I'm not a woman, I'm not a minority, I am
16 not economic social disadvantaged, I would never know
17 that those programs, I could get certification if you
18 could even get certification as a veteran owned
19 business, is that correct? Is that correct?

20 DYNISHAL GROSS: So, the city doesn't
21 have any certification program for veteran owned
22 businesses specifically. The state operates at SDVOB
23 program through OGS. However, you don't need to be
24 certified to do business with the City of New York
25 and the vast majority of firms that win contracts

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2 with the City are not certified that's why the
3 programs continue to be needed, so those firms need
4 only register, get a vendor number with the City,
5 create an account and passport and then they can be
6 solicited for contracts. We're trying to get up to
7 the point where 30% of city contracts go to firms in
8 our certification programs. We're not there yet.
9 So, as a non-certified firm, your chances of winning
10 are certainly no lower than an MWBE. MWBEs are
11 working to gain market share in city procurement.

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Right. But
13 there is a benefit to being a, to being certified by
14 one of these programs obviously. Even if it's 30%
15 that means you're not hitting it because of various
16 reasons but there is an actual benefit to being
17 certified?

18 DYNISHAL GROSS: Yes. We hope so. We,
19 we want very much to support the firms in the program
20 in achieving the goals over the program and serving
21 the city through partnership and contract and, um,
22 and thus growing the firms.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Then, the
24 question is why are we offering veterans a
25 certification that could benefit them?

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2 DYNISHAL GROSS: So the findings in the,
3 uh, in the veteran's business report and I think that
4 reality on the ground is that our certification
5 programs are broad enough to serve most veterans who
6 present themselves as, as needing, you know the
7 support of city programs to end the procurement and
8 for those who do not qualify for our certification
9 programs, we run a procurement technical assistance
10 center that is open to all businesses not just MWBEs,
11 EBEs, or LBEs though that P-Tach program we help any
12 business that wants to grow through government
13 contracting and so I don't know that there is any
14 veteran or veteran business owner who is left out of
15 those supportive services.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you for
17 that answer deputy but when you're, these are big
18 umbrellas and I think in my opening statement I'm not
19 sure if you caught it. I refer to specifically that
20 a nation in this regard, New York City should be
21 judged on how it treats its veterans. Those that
22 adhere to the call, those that we asked to enlist and
23 serve and risk alongside of them by the way is their
24 families and siblings and extended family that serve
25 with our brave men and women in the military. Why

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2 aren't we giving them a program where they could
3 receive certification that they could directly
4 benefit from as a veteran? Not as a veteran woman,
5 not as a veteran minority, not a veteran that is
6 social, economic disadvantaged but under the title
7 veteran, a proud title that they wear as a badge of
8 honor that we don't do enough to recognize?

9 DYNISHAL GROSS: Yeah, I would say that
10 the MWBE program and policy of the City is coming up
11 on 30 years old and we have equity goals in that
12 program. As a said, it's a big tent program that we
13 have not yet achieved and I think the City is still
14 working to, um, innovate and in that program and
15 advance those, the goals of the program to achieve,
16 um, what the other goals that's we've set for MWBE
17 procurement and, and that focus is important because
18 we haven't crossed the finish line yet. And, and
19 more importantly if we're able to serve veteran owned
20 businesses through the, through the programming. Um,
21 you know, we can adjust who we're working with, our,
22 our marketing messages to be sure that veterans are
23 aware that they are welcoming these services and that
24 they're eligible for them if their, if their
25 characteristics align. Um, we looked at numbers for

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2 our P-tach services and this year, so far, we've
3 served 41 veteran owned businesses and 68 instances
4 of technical assistance and capacity building within
5 my division and SBS alone. Last year, we provided
6 140 technical assistance services to veteran owned
7 businesses in my division of SBS alone. And of
8 course, SBS's majority investments in veterans are in
9 our workforce programs where we've served more than
10 24,000 veterans and their spouses since July 2012.
11 So, um, through work with DVS, other partner
12 entities, um, and smart marketing investments, we are
13 managing to reach these veterans and recruit them
14 into the programs. We want to do more and we're
15 committed to doing more in partnership but I don't
16 think we're missing the mark altogether. Those
17 numbers tell me a different service.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Deputy
19 Commissioner Gross, thank you for that. I think the
20 WMBE program is a great program and I hope that will
21 hit that 30% mark but my question was specific, why
22 aren't we offering a similar certification
23 specifically geared to with a title veteran? None of
24 these programs have the word veteran in it?

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2 DYNISHAL GROSS: Yeah, I think the only
3 answer I can provide to that is that the city hasn't
4 identified a need for that type of program, in fact,
5 I think the opposite conclusion was reached. The
6 conclusion in the report and the policy decision
7 coming out of the report was to work to maximize
8 veteran participation in the existing certification
9 program and that's exactly what we've done.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: 210,000 New
11 Yorkers that are veterans that call New York City
12 home, I think is a big marketplace.

13 DYNISHAL GROSS: Great.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: A sizeable
15 pool. Veterans are unique individuals they may not
16 want to be known by any other title, for many of
17 them, serving this country has been their greatest
18 honor and they want to be known as veterans. They
19 want to be accepted as a veteran, not as a minority,
20 not as a woman, not as someone who is social and
21 economically challenged. They want that title
22 veteran. That's my interaction with them. So, when
23 I ask the question why haven't we and you say if the
24 intent is to pull veterans into the MWBE program to
25 raise the number under MWBE I say that's great but my

1
2 concern of veterans strictly why can't we offer
3 similar programs of certification that give veterans
4 an advantage.

5 DYNISHAL GROSS: So, um, the one thing
6 that I'll note in addition to what I've shared
7 previously is that we realize that, you know,
8 identity is very personal and that veteran identity
9 is, is critical to individuals who have served and
10 that's why one of the recommendations in the report
11 was to create a self-identified category for veteran
12 owned businesses that are interested in contracting
13 with the City in our procurement systems and so you
14 heard Commissioner Hendon speak about the operation
15 of that category in the passport system. The most
16 updated number I received from MOX this morning was
17 406 self-identified veterans in that passport system.
18 And so through that self-identified category they are
19 able to identify themselves with that status, um,
20 which you know is a source of pride for many of them.
21 And at the same time they're not required to self-
22 identify in that way as Commissioner Hendon
23 mentioned, you know, it's not something that is
24 universally desired by the veteran community.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Well WMBEs are
3 not universal either but those that choose obviously
4 have...

5 DYNISHAL GROSS: That's right.

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: ... the ability
7 to do so. I, I don't know if you want to add
8 anything to this Commissioner Hendon because I did
9 have a couple of more questions on SBS?

10 JAMES HENDON: I am, I just want to go
11 back to one other question, uh, before about the
12 outreach piece and dedicated staff and for us, we,
13 our charter mandate is focused on six areas, Mr.
14 Chair, and just to name those areas is healthcare,
15 it's housing, it's employment, it's education, it's
16 benefits and it's culture and so, you know, what we
17 hope is that if we interact with someone in one
18 aspect of this then once they come in and see the
19 things we got available then it can touch another
20 aspect. You know, we want to, we can continue to get
21 better. We want to keep cracking this, this nut as
22 far as making sure more of our veterans know who we
23 are but when I look at it, you know, we can claim
24 right now as far as benefit. The hope is that if
25 someone is coming at us in that identity then if it

1
2 turn out they are a businessman or someone who is
3 self-employed, we can help them out. And that's
4 NYC.Gov/vetclaims. The same thing as far as helping
5 veterans wherever they are in the housing journey, be
6 it someone who is housing insecure or someone who is
7 looking for affordable housing, someone who is
8 looking to own. It's NYC.gov/vethousing. We can
9 count for that. When I think about employment, we
10 just launched additional employment tool.
11 NYC.gov/vetconnectpro which helps them identify
12 opportunities for employment especially city jobs and
13 then, you know, the same thing on the benefits, it's
14 vetclaims, NYC.gov/vetclaims. For education it's
15 NYC.gov/studentvet. So for any of our student
16 veterans of which there are about 12,250. Um, so we
17 are trying to get at people through all these
18 different areas within our charter in the hopes that
19 we can net more folks who are self-employed or
20 thinking about entrepreneurship to have them come in
21 and, and be assisted. I just wanted to say that and
22 I appreciate everything you said too about, you know,
23 what we can do, what we need to do and on the culture
24 side it's events like that parade, you know, attended
25 in the Bronx a couple of weeks ago as far as the

1
2 United Veterans Day parade and at the end of it, my
3 remarks, I told everyone, hey, go to NYC.gov/vets to
4 learn more. So, I'm always trying to push people at
5 the various events on culture also to try to get in
6 there and learn about the thing that we have
7 available.

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you
9 Commissioner for that. But this specific hearing is
10 focused on veteran entrepreneurs and small businesses
11 and the, the Department of Veterans Services does a
12 tremendous amount of outreach in other areas, um, and
13 they do a great job. We can always strive to do a
14 better job, especially in the healthcare, housing,
15 unemployment areas where we know veterans are
16 suffering as well as the suicide rates. We don't
17 want to get into those things. Today's hearing is
18 specifically focused on veteran entrepreneurs and the
19 programs and services, support services that we
20 offer. Those that choose to open up a small business.
21 Um, I just want to go back to SBS. So, SBS offers a
22 fast track boot camp that helps veterans apply their
23 skills developed in the military to a growing and
24 successful and profitable businesses is that correct?
25

1
2 DYNISHAL GROSS: SBS has offered the fast
3 track program specific to veterans in past years but
4 not in the last I believe two physical years.

5 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: And is that
6 specifically due to COVID?

7 DYNISHAL GROSS: No. That was due to low
8 enrollment in that cohort of the fast track program.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: So, overall
10 when was the Fast Track Bootcamp Program enacted?

11 DYNISHAL GROSS: SBS has been running
12 Fast Track programs for more than 10 years.

13 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Okay.

14 DYNISHAL GROSS: The Fast Track Boot Camp
15 Program I believe goes back to 2013 and was run, I
16 believe through 20, um, FI '18.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Do we know how
18 many businesses participated in the Fast Track
19 Bootcamp Program? 2013 through '18, five year span.

20 DYNISHAL GROSS: I don't have a
21 comprehensive participation number for you. I can
22 say that for each cohort we attempt to recruit about
23 35 businesses and then we experience some attrition
24 over the course of the cohorts but I'm happy to pull
25

1
2 that for you and share that with the committee as a
3 follow up.

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: That would be
5 great. Do you know how many, um, programs, boot camp
6 programs SBS helped during those five years?

7 DYNISHAL GROSS: Generally its one to two
8 cohorts per year, like with a, with a specific focus
9 like that. The fast track program is, it's based on
10 a curriculum, um, by the Couthman Foundation and it's
11 meant to be, it's instructor led plus peer learning
12 and we are holding Fast Track cohorts for various
13 target audiences so for, for women entrepreneurs,
14 sector based programming, you know, tech
15 entrepreneurs, um, for, for young people, um, various
16 cohorts so probably in those physical years we would
17 have held one veterans cohort per year. Um, but
18 again I'll follow up on that for you.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: So five to 10
20 in total, couldn't be less than 5 and wouldn't be
21 more than 10 over 5 years.

22 DYNISHAL GROSS: That's my belief.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: I have more
24 questions but I want to turn it to some of our
25 colleagues that have joined us and I know Council

1
2 Member Maisel has been in and out a few times and
3 there may be technical issues that he's having but I
4 know that he had joined in. Um, so Council
5 Committee. I'm not sure if the Council Members have
6 any questions.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BIANCA VITALE: Sure.

8 I'll give an opportunity. Thank you. I will now
9 call on Council Members in the order they have used
10 the Zoom Hand Function. If you would like to ask a
11 question and you have not used the Zoom Raise Hand
12 Function, please do so now. Council Members please
13 keep your questions to five minutes and the Sergeant
14 at Arms will keep the timer and will let you know
15 when your time is up. You should begin once I have
16 called on you and the Sergeant has announced that you
17 may begin. Hold on, we have one hand up. Um,
18 Lieutenant Colonel Ron Watson this is for the
19 Committee Members to ask questions of the Admin, when
20 you are giving your testimony, um, maybe you can pose
21 the question that you have during that time? Um,
22 okay, I don't see any Council Member questions, so, I
23 will turn it back to the Chair. Do you have any
24 follow up question and then Chair Gjonaj if you have
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1
2 any follow up questions to ask of the, the admin
3 panel, then we'll turn to public testimony?

4 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: I have really
5 one or two, one is a statement. It sounds like,
6 you're not saying it but that there is a problem with
7 outreach and that there is just not enough staff or
8 resources to really do the outreach that needs to be
9 done to reach out to our, to our veterans our veteran
10 entrepreneurs. I have said it with Chair Gjonaj that
11 there is dignity and pride in being a veteran, um,
12 and while there should be programs specifically for
13 veterans, there is a CB and you keep referring to
14 programs that already exist and funneling our
15 veterans to programs that already exist, so, the EBE
16 program for example. Are veterans just explicitly or
17 always considered socially dis-advantaged? Does
18 every veteran qualify for this program because of
19 reasons like that? Can you talk more about that
20 please?

21 DYNISHAL GROSS: Sure. So, eligibility
22 for the EBE programs requires that the majority owner
23 of the firm belong to a social group that has been
24 socially disadvantaged, you know, in this country and
25 we do consider that veterans have been social

1
2 disadvantaged as a group so by establishing military
3 service they establish that prong of identity in a
4 social group that has been historically
5 disadvantaged. But the EBE program also requires a
6 proof of economic disadvantage. In the EBE program
7 we have a personal network limitation of \$1 million
8 and so they need to show that their personal net
9 worth does not exceed that and also that they've
10 experienced some disadvantage in business related to
11 their, the social category that they're part of so.
12 So, that they have experienced some disadvantage in
13 business related to their status as a veteran. You
14 know, that could be, they share a narrative with our
15 team, um, about that social disadvantage. So, for
16 example, it could be that repeated deployments have
17 impaired their ability to develop credit that would
18 allow them to finance their business or that the
19 actual stops and starts in their ability to run
20 their, operate the business or gain clients due to
21 their military service. There might have been
22 discrimination related to their service in a
23 particular, in a particular war. Um, so for every
24 applicant to EBE they're sharing an individual
25 narrative about that disadvantage, but veteran status

1
2 alone meets the requirement of social disadvantage in
3 the program.

4 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: To me, it
5 sounds like we've also established that because of
6 allowing the, a lot of the items that you laid out
7 and because of veteran status, they're more likely to
8 be at an economic disadvantage, not being able to
9 start a business as early as they would've wanted to
10 let's say, or being re-deployed. These are things
11 that you mentioned. We've spoken about how they have
12 received negative treatment, so wouldn't all veterans
13 be eligible for the EBE certification?

14 DYNISHAL GROSS: It's a consideration of
15 applicant to the program. And we, we do our due
16 diligence about the individual owners and their
17 businesses, and, you know, and their, and their
18 stories. Um, so I can't give you a blanket answer
19 that all veterans would be eligible, um, because
20 those stories are different. But, we certainly work
21 to support our veterans in understanding the
22 requirements of the program, assessing their
23 eligibility for the program before doing the work to
24 apply and then getting in a solid application that we
25 can use to verify their eligibility for the program,

1
2 and, and again if they're not eligible for that
3 certification program, they are still gaining
4 supports through our P-TACH.

5 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Right. So,
6 so, you know again, what I'm hearing, and correct me
7 if I'm wrong is, what do we have, for veterans what
8 special services and supports do we have for veterans
9 who literally put the lives on the line and put their
10 families on hold? What does SBS have and the answer
11 is the same thing that every other business has. And
12 I don't say that to insult the work you do, I'm sure
13 you work very hard to find the services that may
14 apply to our veterans but to tack on what Council
15 Member Gjonaj said there doesn't seem to be anything
16 that's small business services does that really shows
17 our support for our veterans. There's nothing
18 specifically for them, like you do the work to help
19 funnel them in the, in the right services that
20 already exist. But when it comes to recognizing our,
21 you know, our veterans it doesn't seem as though
22 those programs are quite there?

23 DYNISHAL GROSS: I think, I think that's
24 fair on the entrepreneurialship side with the
25 exception that we have offered the Fast Track for

1 veterans specifically and are happy to, um, you know
2 re-offer that service in the future with a
3 partnership of DBS and other partners and recruiting
4 or it. It's not a lack of willingness or a lack of
5 the resource. Um, but, you know, we need to recruit.
6 It's meant to be kind of peer learning cohort based
7 program so we need to be able to recruit enough
8 veterans to offer the cohort but on the workforce
9 side we are offering services that are very specific
10 to veteran job seekers and their spouses. Um, and
11 they're veteran specialists in that system that are
12 proving those services very effectively. I said
13 24,000 veterans and spouses connected to jobs in
14 career development since the onset of that program in
15 2012. And, and I would also just reiterate that our
16 partnership with the DVS and all of the veteran
17 serving entities that we can reach through Department
18 of Veteran Services to increase awareness of the
19 services that we provide is, is probably our most
20 important relationship and that is a partnership
21 that, you know, wasn't available at the time of the
22 report and that we really value and expect to yield
23 further benefits.
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CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you. I

don't know if Chair Gjonaj has anything to add or any other Committee Members, um, want to use their Zoom Raise Hand Function to ask their question. Um, I don't know.

BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We have a question from Council Member Vallone. So, Council Member Vallone you may begin when the Sergeant starts.

PAUL VALLONE: Good afternoon everyone.

SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

PAUL VALLONE: Um, sorry, good afternoon everyone. Thank you to the Co-Chairs and thank you to Chair Dinowitz and Gjonaj for continuing the conversation. So much work has been done Commissioner, I guess, both with DVS and small business to make sure veterans have their say and can be found as most of our conversations are as locating, finding and servicing veterans. It just, I just wanted to get your, what do you think would be next in your vision to, to make sure that the concerns of both of the Committee Chairs and the advocates to, to make sure that a veteran is listed on the job, on the services, on the website to, to

1
2 make sure that every other effort can be made. What
3 do you envision as the next generation of services
4 that can incorporate that because you know, obviously
5 we're going to be handing off to the next of Council
6 Members? We have a very great Chair that is now that
7 is going to take into the next term with Chair
8 Dinowitz. Um, and I feel from the time I started 8
9 years ago where there wasn't a DVS, there was just an
10 office, we have taken mountains and steps forward and
11 I'm proud to co-Chair that and it's been an amazing
12 eight years working with all of our veterans but I
13 just wanted to see what you would think would be the
14 next step to advocate, especially what Chair Gjonaj
15 was talking about and making that priority and the
16 personnel and the website and the services with small
17 businesses, it still seems to me that we need to take
18 that next step to make sure that it's that full
19 incorporation between two agencies.

20 JAMES HENDON: Thank you so much for the
21 question, um, not Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, Council
22 Member Vallone.

23 PAUL VALLONE: It's all good.

24 JAMES HENDON: I know you chair, a
25 different, a different committee right. Um, you

1 know, just a couple of thoughts come to mind for me.
2 One of them is this is inter-push pull. In other
3 words, how do we make something attractive where more
4 veterans say let's seek these folks out and make sure
5 we're on this map so that we can be seen, you know,
6 until there's the side of it of what can we do to be
7 able to, to, you know pull more veterans in and how
8 do we do outreach to pull more veterans in but then
9 there's the other side of it is how do we create this
10 environment where there's this push? Where veterans
11 say look, I really want to be a part of this thing
12 and I hear with Chair Gjonaj is saying in that if you
13 have some sort of, you know, special certification,
14 special programming for the veterans it's easier for
15 more people to just come up out of the woodwork with
16 it if they see this thing. They can be able to, you
17 know, say okay, here's the benefit for me for being a
18 part of this and we, I totally see that and so I
19 guess for one part of it to me, is, you know, beyond
20 the, the government aspect of this, making sure that
21 we are putting our veterans in touch with private
22 sector procurement opportunities. Like making sure
23 they know this is bigger than just contract with the
24 City, with the State and the feds but also that
25

1
2 you've got Fortune 500 companies that are based here
3 in New York. You've got other folks who do things as
4 applied diversity from major corporations to make
5 sure that they also are, um, you know are aware of
6 who our people are. So, we'll get a Greater New York
7 Chamber of Commerce event a few weeks ago and I said
8 no one can say they couldn't find a veteran business,
9 you know, to try to encourage folks to do business
10 with our people. I feel like that's one side on
11 this. Another side of it is how do we, I mean, we
12 used to, you know, Deputy Commissioner Gross and
13 myself and others would get on a regular call every
14 other week to talk about these things and figure this
15 stuff out and a lot of it is to get to this place
16 where we would have the special certification
17 designations there needs to be some sort of disparity
18 study, or some sort of a factual accounting of here's
19 who our veterans are and what they're doing as far
20 as their interactions with the City on procurement
21 level. And this is why we've been holding different
22 webinars with P-Tachs, with SBS to kind of try to get
23 as many of our veterans as possible to get certified
24 in some way, some shape, some form to come on the
25 radar and then to say, okay, here's the opportunity

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2 to do business with the City. If I can show more of
3 our people who have worked to try to do business with
4 the City, we can say, here's the number of veterans
5 who pride this and here's what's happened as far as
6 outcomes. There's reason for us to have some sort of
7 special program akin to what we see for our minority
8 and women owned businesses and the EBEs. Then it
9 makes it all the easier for this to just lock in, but
10 right now we're not there and that's why we keep
11 talking about this map and talking about trying to
12 get more people in it, talking about trying to engage
13 them about doing business with the city so we have
14 data to come back and say I remember that and say
15 yeah, I, I, I see how this lines up.

16 PAUL VALLONE: Yeah, I remember that.

17 JAMES HENDON: I don't know if that make
18 sense?

19 PAUL VALLONE: You know it does and
20 that's exactly the division you outlined together
21 with us and it was so good to hear at the beginning
22 and I and at one of the first bills and I know Chair
23 Dinowitz was, was trying to get that forward by
24 putting in for this conversation was requiring other
25 city agencies to get that data to you. Because

1
2 whatever, no matter what committee I've ever sat on
3 it's always been this interagency cooperation issue
4 and it's not necessarily DVS fault or.

5 SGT. JONES: Time expired.

6 PAUL VALLONE: With that information and
7 sometimes a veteran may, may appear or show
8 themselves through, through housing or small business
9 or through immigration or through so many other
10 agencies and I think one of the first conversations
11 you and I had was trying to get that data to you and
12 DVS to work that template so that it didn't fall
13 through the cracks because like I said not, every
14 veterans is from different generations, different
15 ages, different conflicts, different wars, they have
16 a different knowledge of computer, internet or face-
17 based programs or like I said Chambers of Commerce,
18 great, great partners to have because every one of
19 the boroughs have that but sometimes they don't know
20 how to interact and I think you doing that is a great
21 step. And I think that piece maybe some way that we
22 can help with future or current legislation to
23 require and again always to increase your budget,
24 right, you've got to have the staff and the ability
25 to handle that, I mean, listen you started with like

1 two people and now we're up to, now a pretty decent
2 crew but it's never enough. I think requiring the
3 agencies through whether it's the Deputy Commissioner
4 through the SBS, to make sure that you know that
5 there's not a veteran that's come through a different
6 portal that didn't necessarily come through DVS but
7 still there's another way that we can help. Sorry
8 for going over time.

10 JAMES HENDON: I, I, I, I just want to, I
11 don't want. I just want to say I agree with you
12 completely on that. Something that was done earlier
13 this year and, you know, Deputy Commissioner Francis,
14 he can speak more to it is you know we saw an
15 Executive Order passed by the Mayor, E065 requiring
16 our agencies to start asking these veteran identifier
17 questions. I, it breaks my heart that we'll get to a
18 place, we're getting all the data regularly from our
19 peer agencies after you leave office because it is
20 something that was very important to you. You know,
21 I remember that too as far as one of the first
22 discussions that we had, Council Member Vallone so
23 you're not to going to leave, more going on with that
24 but this is something where there's an EO on this
25 side of it. I can't speak to legislation that's

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2 occurred here but it is something that's required of
3 city agencies to ask some form of a veteran
4 identifier question so we can, I keep telling people
5 that we want to know as m&m's as possible so we can
6 pull the green ones out when necessary. That's
7 really what it does to get at this data question
8 because of these discussions goes back to need the
9 data to be able to then take these next steps and do
10 these other things.

11 PAUL VALLONE: I, I remember even when
12 they came up with that, I remember when they came up
13 with the New York City ID card and didn't even have
14 it for veterans and that was one of my first battles
15 to say why don't we have a designation for veteran.
16 They eventually got there, but again, the advocates
17 we didn't have. So, I thank you for the extra time
18 and I just wanted to, today, since we are in December
19 and this is probably my last. It's truly been an
20 honor to work with everyone on this panel and fellow
21 Council Members especially for veterans for eight
22 years. I've fought to stay on this Committee and I
23 have, I have truly grown in my knowledge for that and
24 I will always take it with me wherever we go and I
25 want to thank everyone and it looks like this path is

1 just getting bigger and better and I think Chair
2 Dinowitz for the extra time. Thank you and God
3 Bless, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays to everyone.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: We've been
6 joined by Council Member Rosenthal. Go ahead Council
7 Member.

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you Chair
9 and I just want to thank Council Member Vallone for
10 those comments he made. So, before I'm going to ask
11 the question about Commissioner Hendon and Deputy
12 Commissioner Gross. I can help come up with creative
13 ideas on how to do outreach and that would be working
14 with our business communities, that would be working
15 with the BIDs, the Business Improvement Districts,
16 that would be working with the Chambers, the Merchant
17 Associations and there's a slew of business-oriented
18 organizations that you can do outreach but the real
19 question that comes to mind is, regardless of that
20 outreach and identifying veteran owned businesses.
21 There is no benefit for a veteran entrepreneur to
22 self-identify as a veteran business in New York City
23 that's the point. You have no carrot. There is no
24 special status. There is no special certification or
25 a, uh, or an advantage to being recognized as a

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2 veteran entrepreneur in New York City. The state has
3 a program, the federal government has a program,
4 what's clear is New York City does not have a
5 program. So the question is, given a magic wand and
6 the ability to create magic, is there anything that
7 either of you can suggest that New York City do,
8 especially with the incoming administration, that
9 they should do to help veteran entrepreneurs identify
10 as a veteran-owned company that would directly
11 benefit them?

12 JAMES HENDON: Deputy Commissioner Gross,
13 do you want to take that first or you want me to
14 start with that one?

15 DYNISHAL GROSS: You can, you can start
16 Commissioner.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: That's a hard
18 one Commissioner, I know, it's difficult and I, I
19 know your heart is in the right, your heart is there
20 and sometimes it's difficult to find the words, so
21 I'm asking in a perfect world given all of the
22 economic needs that you could come up, what is it
23 that we can do?

24 JAMES HENDON: This is me speaking as a,
25 uh as a business owner myself, as a service disabled

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2 business owner and someone who ran an incubator for
3 veterans who have their own businesses. I just want
4 to say that first, I think that we can look at the
5 discretionary spending amount and look at you
6 potentially increasing it. Um, you know, because if
7 you look at the state level, the discretionary
8 spending level for SDVOBs and MWBEs it's a half a
9 million dollars claimed. At the city level it's a
10 half a million for our MWBEs. I feel like if we said
11 that if you are a SDVOB state certified and you get
12 city certified as well as part certified as an EBE or
13 as an LBE or something like that, sometimes that's
14 not already at that \$500,000 level that you too would
15 have a, you would have a, you'd have the same
16 discretionary spend. There is already precedent for
17 it at the state level, so even it wouldn't go to the
18 full half million, something better than the current
19 discretionary spend cap of \$20,000 for non-MWBEs
20 would be something that I think would be a first
21 step. I just think that would make sense as like an
22 initial step to kind of make sure our veterans know,
23 we see you, we appreciate you and we think this could
24 be something. You know, I just feel like that,
25 that's something that we could be able to do. That's

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2 just me, you asked the question Chair Gjonaj and
3 that's the answer.

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you
5 Commissioner. Deputy Commissioner?

6 DYNISHAL GROSS: So, I guess first I
7 would want to, if I had a magic wand, I would want to
8 do what the barriers in our communication were that,
9 that caused any veteran to believe that the existing
10 programs were either not friend, not, not didn't
11 acknowledge their status of veterans. I want, I want
12 the impact of these programs is to be as broad as
13 possible and if there are individuals that they are
14 trying to serve who believe that they, that they
15 don't belong in these programs, I want to, I want to
16 tackle that. So that's, that's one thing and the
17 second thing would be to grow our P-tach services. I
18 think the one on one technical assistance that the P-
19 tach counselors provide is extremely effective, um,
20 not just in helping folks know how to register and
21 certify but helping them identify contract
22 opportunities on the City, State and Federal level
23 and they win at all of those levels of contracting.
24 I would love to have more P-tach counselors to serve
25 our veterans community and I would, that would

1
2 require investment by both the city and by the
3 federal government, since that's a partnership,
4 delivering that service is a partnership. So, with a
5 magic wand every, every veteran with an
6 intersectional identity I want in the programs that,
7 that address them now and I want to address the
8 barriers to their participation and I want more P-
9 tach services.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: And I just want
11 to make sure that I understand that correctly Deputy
12 Commissioner Gross, under the title of veteran
13 correct? Not under any other program, under the
14 specific certification of veteran?

15 DYNISHAL GROSS: No that's, that, that
16 wasn't my, what I was saying, yeah, that's not what I
17 was saying. I was saying I there are veterans who
18 are women, veterans of color, veterans who do not
19 believe that our MWBE and EBE certification are
20 appropriate to them because somehow their veterans
21 identity has to be subsumed or is not going to be
22 recognized in those programs, I want to address
23 whatever communication, marketing or service issues
24 that we are having in the programs that create that
25

1
2 perception so that everyone that those programs are
3 attempting to serve can benefit from those program.

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Well, that's my
5 point, I just wanted to make sure that I didn't
6 misunderstand you. I go back to self-identifying as
7 a veteran-owned business that does not want to be
8 under the umbrella of any other program other than
9 veteran and this could work well for the private
10 sector as well as the public sector by the way,
11 because we have private sector entities that would be
12 proud to work with a veteran owned company but that's
13 the private sector our discussion here is what can
14 the public sector do to entice identifying veterans
15 that would benefit from the billions of dollars that
16 we spend every year. Our last budget and I was
17 earmarked at \$104 billion for New York City and what
18 I'm hearing is not a single of that \$104 billion is
19 going to go specifically to a veteran owned company
20 under the title veteran.

21 DYNISHAL GROSS: So, the last time we did
22 an analysis of contracting wins by veterans we looked
23 at it based on the OGS list of service disabled
24 veterans and we found that of the, SDVOBs in FY20 I
25 believe we had \$82 million in city contracts that

1
2 were won by our state certified SDVOB. And, and we
3 had a portion of those that had currently gained MWBE
4 or EBE certification and we've been working to
5 increase that proportion. So, it's not the case that
6 veteran owned businesses are not succeeding in city
7 procurement. We know that they could succeed at a
8 higher rate with more technical assistance and with
9 more access to the certification programs but they
10 are able to access to those opportunities and on our
11 last analysis they were succeeding at the tune of \$82
12 nearly \$83 million dollars in that Fiscal Year.

13 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you for
14 that answer but I think it went around my question
15 and that is not because they are veteran enterprises.
16 They fell under another category and I'm saying
17 specifically recognizing veterans for their service,
18 specifically. The city could do more, must do more,
19 we certainly have a budget that can be allocated to
20 this and there is no reason why we shouldn't. We
21 talk about veterans three times a year and we don't
22 give them enough, they've earned it, they're entitled
23 to it and under the title of veteran should be an
24 exclusive group that are afforded opportunities aside
25 from all the other programs that are afforded to all

1
2 other organizations. That's the point that I'm
3 trying to make and I didn't want to be that direct
4 but I guess it is. I have no more questions and I
5 want to thank, I hope the Commissioner and Deputy
6 Commissioner will stay on as we hear from some of the
7 others that are going to testify and I'm sure
8 they'll, they'll have ideas as well as suggestions
9 that perhaps the next administration can implement.

10 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All
11 right, well thank you. Chair Dinowitz, do you have
12 any follow up questions before we turn to the first
13 public panel? Okay.

14 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: I do not.
15 Thank you.

16 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No
17 worries. We have concluded.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: I'm sorry. One
19 thing does come to mind, you know, we have vendor
20 licenses and I know the state has a policy in place
21 where veterans do not, are not restricted based on
22 any number of permits that are issued and could in
23 parks vend openly. Why isn't New York City giving
24 that at a minimum? Number of permits or licenses to
25 vend on city streets toward veterans? Not WMBEs, not

1
2 social economically challenged or disabled,
3 specifically veterans? That would be a good start.
4 I'm sorry.

5 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No
6 worries. Everybody, may I turn to the public panel,
7 Chair Gjonaj.

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you.

9 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uh-
10 huh. Okay. No worries. Um, we've concluded
11 administration testimony and will now turn to public
12 testimony. I'd like to remind everyone that we will
13 be calling on individuals one by one to testify.
14 Each panelist will be given three minutes to speak.
15 For panelists, after I call your name a member of our
16 staff will un-mute you. There may be a few seconds
17 of delay before you are unmuted and again we thank
18 you for your patience. Please wait a brief moment
19 for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may
20 begin before starting your testimony. Council
21 Members who have questions for a particular panelist
22 should use the Zoom Raise Hand Function. I will call
23 on you after the panelists completed their testimony
24 in the order in which you raised your hand. I would
25 like, I would like to now welcome Peter C. Del-Debbio

1
2 (SP), Lt. Col. Ron Watson and Gene DeFrancis to
3 testify. Peter, you may begin when the timer starts.

4 SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

5 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Peter,
6 you may begin. Oh, I think we're having an audio
7 problem we can't hear you, Peter. You're still on
8 mute. Okay. I don't know what's happening. Give me
9 one second.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Can we go to
11 any other panelists while we try to work it out with
12 Peter?

13 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sure.
14 Peter, can you try one more time? If we can't hear
15 you right now we'll get back to you. I'm going to
16 move to the next panelist. Lt. Col. Ron Watson, when
17 the timer starts you may begin?

18 SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

19 LT. COL. RON WATSON: That's me. Can
20 everybody hear me?

21 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're
22 good.

23 LT. COL. RON WATSON: Okay great. All
24 right, well good afternoon everyone. My name is Lt.
25 Col. Ron Watson, I spent 22 years in the Marine Corp

1
2 on active duty, combat arms and special operations in
3 worldwide deployment. First here, I would like to
4 thank the Committee for all that they are doing and
5 also a special shout-out to the Commissioner for
6 speaking at the Veteran's Day Parade. It's good
7 seeing you again. Upon retirement from the Marine
8 Corp, I was employed by the Lotti Martin Corporation
9 as a principal responsible for winning hundreds of
10 millions of dollars' worth of contracts and I've
11 listened to this, all the remarks today and it sounds
12 like we're doing some good things but I think we need
13 a couple of foreseen functions, one of which every
14 contract I competed for from Lotti Martin responding
15 to an RFP, there was a small business percentage that
16 we had to meet. So, for example, let's say 40% of
17 the contract had to be small business. Of that 40%,
18 there was a certain percentage that must have gone to
19 veteran owned businesses and disabled owned veteran
20 owned businesses in addition to the women owned,
21 minority owned, the under privileged environments,
22 etcetera, etcetera. That forcing function alone was
23 significant in drawing multiple veteran owned
24 businesses into profitability. A couple of other
25 things that I'm going to share, some of which have

1
2 been addressed, some you might even be doing that
3 perhaps were not even addressed today but one is to
4 establish some type of an internship. You know, just
5 like the NFL has a Rooney Rule, we can have a Hendon
6 Rule, you know, where we create internships with the
7 large business corporations in the City of New York
8 first for employments but to develop that business
9 where they can start their own small businesses after
10 that. You know we can liaise with the business
11 improvement districts and the Chamber of Commerce
12 which was already addressed today. The other thing
13 we can do it, as a city resident and as a disabled
14 veteran, when I go to pay my property taxes, I'm
15 getting the veterans discount, that's great, let's do
16 the same for the veteran's businesses so that they
17 can get tax breaks on their licensing fees, their
18 permit fees and the taxes in which they have to pay
19 and by the way, let's see if we can accelerate that
20 process and streamline it so we can fast track them
21 into profitability. The other thing I'll suggest and
22 this is part of reaching out. You know, there was
23 numbers before that was talked about, the 210,808
24 vets in the New York area. That number is going to
25 increase because every single branch of the service

1
2 is reducing in numbers. There's going to be some
3 forced reductions. They are not going to be
4 recruiting as heavily and a lot of that has to do is
5 we are no longer fighting war on terrorism but
6 technology. But we can establish pilot programs,
7 reaching out to certain schools. Who, who ...

8 SGT. JONES: Time expired.

9 LT. COL. RON WATSON: Who's going to
10 school on a GI bill? Okay. Let's identify those
11 people and, and fast track them into some business,
12 uh, business programs and some small start-ups. So,
13 the last one I'll mention is because my time is
14 running out here is, let's, as a city let's start a
15 veteran owned company. Okay, a small company
16 employed by vets that the city provides a small
17 investment in is a pilot program and we'll pick
18 something in the STEM field, maybe cybersecurity
19 which is much needed and there's a lot of veterans
20 that have that technology and cybersecurity is a
21 technology that's needed to our banking industry,
22 business, etcetera. We get a nucleus of folks that
23 recruits the vets that have those skills and they
24 start a company and then that company competes for
25 business within the City of New York. Again, I'll go

1
2 back to forcing function, meeting those small
3 business goals and part of those goals being veteran
4 employment is definitely going to increase the amount
5 of vets that will do business and that will pull them
6 into your program. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: I want to thank
8 you Lt. Col. Watson for the relationship, the
9 friendship and the work that you do. I'm proud to
10 represent you and I'm proud of the work that you do
11 in the 13th Council District and citywide. You bring
12 up an interesting point that these service men and
13 women, the services that are scaling back and as
14 these men and women return back to the states and
15 look for permanent homes.

16 LT. COL. RON WATSON: Mm-hmm.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: If we programs
18 that would entice veterans to make, call New York
19 City home because that would, you know, offer support
20 and investment in them. I would imagine more
21 veterans would currently seek to live in New York
22 City. It would only make sense that you build and
23 they shall come. If we create the infrastructure for
24 them that many of them would choose to call New York
25 City home that perhaps currently don't as they return

1
2 and end their tour. Is that the point that you're
3 making?

4 LT. COL. RON WATSON: That's the point
5 I'm making and thank you for that and I, I tell
6 people that we live in the most patriotic city in the
7 country and it's one that every single city in the
8 United States tries to imitate. And I still work,
9 do work with the veterans. I am involved with the
10 American Legion, I'm the co-Chair of the Veterans Day
11 Parade in the Bronx. I participate in multiple
12 studies at the VA and I also do all of the
13 congressional interviews for the 14th Congressional
14 District that those New York kids that want to go to
15 the service can. You know, veterans, and we talk
16 about PTSD and so many issues that veterans are
17 having and yes, that's true and I'm confident that
18 the VA and the city of New York is doing all they can
19 to help them. Commissioner, your message was well
20 received two weeks ago but the message that I have is
21 that veterans they come with a sense of urgency, with
22 a can do attitude, with mission accomplishment, being
23 a team player, how to get things done. Those are the
24 people that big business, small business wants to

1
2 employ and those are the opportunities that we should
3 be pursuing for them. Thank you.

4 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
5 you so much Lt. Col. Ron Watson. We will now be
6 hearing from Gene DeFrancis. You may begin when the
7 time starts and Peter we're going to come back to you
8 and hopefully your audio is working, so don't forget.
9 We didn't forget about you.

10 SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

11 GENE DEFRANCIS: Great. I want to thank
12 the Committee, Council Members, Commissioner, thank
13 you for joining us. My name is Gene DeFrancis, I
14 have an interesting expertise in this because I'm a
15 veteran and I also founded and organized a Merchant's
16 Association here in the Bronx. So, I see first here,
17 daily in and day out, what the small businesses in
18 New York have to deal with and I, the newly elected
19 First Vice Commander for the American Legion in Bronx
20 County. So, usually I don't attend these Zoom calls
21 or Council Meetings. Quite frankly because I have
22 little faith in them. I'm very active in the
23 community. I attend all Community Board Meetings,
24 Precinct Council Meetings but when it comes to large
25 city, big clunky meetings, they seem to end in an

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2 echo chamber and you're looking at the numbers,
3 you're seeing what's clearly not working. Um, and I
4 want to suggest to the Committee, to the Commissioner
5 and to everyone listening to change the narrative.
6 It's coming across that we're assisting veterans in
7 entrepreneurialship. You can assist veterans in
8 homeless needs, you can assist veterans in employment
9 needs but when you're looking to be an entrepreneur
10 you are seeking the best of the best and that's
11 veterans. Veterans are the best of the best, yes we
12 have issues with a small percentage of PTSD and
13 unemployment and homelessness and suicide rate as
14 well. These are all crisis issues but in the grand
15 scheme of things this is not the large majority of a
16 veteran and it's definitely not who you're looking to
17 recruit which is what I would look as a term. You're
18 recruiting veterans to start a business in New York
19 because I would, I would ask the Committee, I would
20 ask the Commissioner what are the Westchester County
21 numbers, what are Nassau and Suffolk County Numbers
22 because if I have to and I didn't do research. I'm
23 just going off of my day to day activity those
24 numbers likely didn't increase because it's almost
25 impossible to do business in New York City and

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2 especially in the Bronx where we have no parking, we
3 have very little foot traffic due to the perception
4 of danger, panhandlers, crime, dirt, it's very hard
5 to do business in New York City, I would have better
6 chance. And I am an entrepreneur but I would make
7 more at a flea market or more money at Atlantic City
8 that all the regulations, all the challenges that you
9 have to face running a business in the Bronx or in
10 New York City at large. It's just too many. And you
11 could assist as much as you want but for any average
12 veteran to put in and invest that kind of money it's
13 just much easier to go elsewhere. And I want to
14 thank you all. I see my time is running out. I have
15 so much more to say on this and I look forward with
16 working with each and every one of you but that's
17 just the basic core of it is the paradigm of how we
18 are promoting this to veterans because it is a unique
19 culture. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: I want to thank
21 you Gene because I also represent Gene as a
22 constituent but just for the point, you can submit
23 written testimony and the Council Committee will
24 repeat that as well. Although the hearing ends, you

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2 can submit testimony and I'm not sure for what the
3 deadline is, is it 48 hours is that what I recall?

4 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I
5 think something like that. I'll double check with
6 our staff and I will confer on the record for
7 everything but definitely if you have written
8 testimony, definitely submit to
9 testimony@nyc.council.gov.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: And the reason
11 I say that Gene is because the points that you want
12 to make and after reflecting and hearing from the
13 other panelists, could be useful and they become a
14 part of the record that later on the next
15 administration will hopefully look at and come with
16 enticements and other corrections and investments
17 that are needed. That's why I ask and that goes for
18 all of the panelists. So, thank you Gene.

19 GENE DEFRANCIS: Well, you're welcome and
20 like I said thank you for having the time and if I
21 could use the three months for response to, to
22 emphasize one more important fact and that's to
23 attack this as a two, as a two-flank attack. You
24 also have to do the research in the community. You
25 can give a grant to someone but if the Community

1
2 doesn't need that function for instance, a salon, a
3 deli, you're putting in that money to put someone out
4 of business because there's only so much space of a
5 pie that customers can cling to and the businesses
6 can cling to, so if you're giving money to one
7 organization or a group. Say, for instance, I own a
8 salon and you're investing in a salon to open up
9 right next door to me and be my competitor this is
10 not good business and this is not helping the
11 community. For instance, my community needs a toy
12 store, we need a coffee shop, we need a gym, find,
13 recruit veterans to open these businesses in the
14 communities that are in need and, and going at that
15 angle on both sides, this project will work. Any
16 other way, you're just throwing money at a situation
17 that won't work, but thank you again.

18 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
19 you so much Gene. I'm going to now turn it back to
20 Peter and see if Peter has audio. Peter?

21 PETER DEL-DEBBIO: Hello everybody. I
22 apologize for not being prompt with the audio.

23 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No
24 worries at all. We're going to, you may begin when
25 the Sergeant at Arms starts the clock.

1
2 SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

3 PETER DEL-DEBBIO: In the Bronx, as far
4 as the American Legion which I represent, there are
5 12 posts in the Bronx, five of which. There are five
6 posts that are paper posts or administrative posts
7 that are all done by paper totaling 17 posts. In
8 Councilman Gjonaj's District alone there are 7
9 physical posts and there are paper posts which total
10 10 posts. So on the 17 posts Bronx wide he holds 10
11 of them and then there's one post which is called Am-
12 vest, which is also a veteran's service post. The
13 two points that I wish to make are, and they both tie
14 in with what my esteemed colleague, Lt. Col. Ron
15 Watson had mentioned. DVS could be contacting or
16 consider contacting respectfully Commissioner, they
17 should be contacting not only veterans groups but
18 veterans groups at colleges. I think Ron touched to
19 that but we have veterans advisers at these collages,
20 I personally have contacted, not only Sumi Maritime
21 which is right in our district but also I've extended
22 it to Fordum University and I talked to those Veteran
23 liaisons on those campuses on a regular basis. So,
24 I'm not sure if you've done it before but it's
25 definitely a pot that you want to touch base with.

1
2 And very quickly, we mentioned about tax breaks. I as
3 a veteran received a tax break like Ron Watson had
4 mentioned. I can go anywhere out of the City of New
5 York. Anywhere outside the City and I've had this
6 conversation with Councilman Gjonaj. Outside the
7 City I can walk in to the town clerk or any of the
8 municipal offices anywhere outside the five boroughs
9 and I can get a list of, of veterans that are
10 receiving tax break. You cannot do that in the city
11 of New York. I have tried unsuccessfully.
12 Department of Finance will not release that
13 information no matter who asks for it. I've had
14 Councilman Gjonaj ask for it, I've had Assemblyman
15 Bonodono (SP) ask for it, none of that will be
16 released. None of that is available. So that puts
17 not only DVS at a disadvantage of identifying those
18 veterans that are receiving those tax breaks but also
19 puts folks like me that would like to garner member
20 to my organization. I would like to see maybe in the
21 next session the City Council maybe address that
22 issue and I, maybe release that information. Those
23 are the two things that I, two issues that I wanted
24 to discuss. Thank you all very much and I look

1 forward to working in the future with Chairman
2 Dinowitz.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Peter, I want
5 to thank you because I also have the privilege of
6 representing you as a constituent. But, just for the
7 record Peter, you also have a title. Can you tell us
8 what that title is when it comes to the Veteran's
9 Organization that you have?

10 PETER DEL-DEBBIO: Yes, I'm the Past
11 Commander of the Bronx County I am the current
12 Adjuvant of Bronx and I also serve at the state level
13 and the national level for the American Legion. At
14 the state level I am the Chair of the National
15 Security Committee and at the national level I am
16 also on National Security Committee, Council I think
17 it's called, Council.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: And I want to
19 thank you and I want to thank all of the brave men
20 and women for their service and God Bless our
21 Veterans and thank you for continuing to give back to
22 this country in so many other forms. Thank you.

23 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
24 you Chair Gjonaj I'm going to actually now turn it
25

1
2 over to Chair Dinowitz for questions for this panel,
3 do you have any, Chair Dinowitz?

4 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: No. No
5 additional questions.

6 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay.
7 Great. We're going to now turn to our second. Oh,
8 actually, it's Council Member questions. I know will
9 turn it over to questions from other Council Members?
10 I will now ask if there are any more questions for
11 Council Members to use their Zoom Raise Hand Function
12 at this time. Okay, seeing as there are no hands
13 raised, I will call on the next panel. Okay. We
14 would like to now welcome Dave Chiaro. After Dave we
15 will be hearing from Peter Kempner and after Peter
16 Kempner, we will be hearing from Robert Piechota.
17 Um, Dave when the Sergeant at Arms starts the timer
18 you may begin.

19 SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

20 DAVE CHIARO: Thank you very much Bianca
21 for this invite. It's, it's very timely and I say
22 that because for the past three days I was up at Vet
23 Con which is a yearly event for the past five years
24 that gathers together all of the veteran and service
25 disabled certified in New York State up in Albany for

1
2 essentially an event that goes ahead and pairs up
3 those certified service disabled veteran owned
4 businesses with the procurement opportunities at the
5 state level so it would be with the public aspect as
6 well as private industries that are up there so
7 that's, that's a yearly thing and again being a very
8 timely basis and one thing that I would like to, to
9 just comment on, on, there was when Commissioner
10 Herndon had initially, we had, we had spoken a little
11 over a year ago and I am very thankful for the fact
12 of him notifying small business development center
13 which I'm the Veteran Business Advisor at Farmingdale
14 State College but I also one of the founding not for
15 profit charitable organization of the organization
16 called the New York Veteran Owned Business
17 Association which represents all of the 900 plus
18 businesses in the State of New York that are service
19 disabled. What I'd like to sort of clarify with both
20 chairs is, is like the 50,000 view of veteran versus
21 Service Disabled Veterans and the, and the specific
22 levels because there is I think a little mis-
23 perception. So, as a certified veteran owned
24 business, certified, that certification only exists
25 at the federal level with the VA, veteran. They also

1 have a service disabled federal level at that level.
2
3 Now we move down to state level. There is no veteran
4 certification at the state level. There is a service
5 disabled veteran owned certification and then when we
6 move down to counties, especially in the State of New
7 York, currently there are only four counties that
8 have a nesting view be it service disabled veteran
9 owned business I'll call incentive and that would be
10 Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester and Onondaga Counties.
11 So, during all of the testimony that I was listening
12 to before, New York City can be an addition to those
13 four counties, getting those five counties on board
14 and again referring back to this Vet Con and
15 conversation with many administrators so for
16 instance, Ken Williams who is the State certifier at
17 New York State Office of General Services.
18 Essentially we had, we had gotten it down very
19 simplistically to say, you know what, the MWBE exists
20 at the federal level, the MWBE exists at the state
21 level, the MWBE exists at the county level, so,
22 without the disparity study which by the way, New
23 York State did not conduct a disparity study, nor did
24 Nassau or Suffolk.

25 SGT. JONES: Time expired.

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DAVE CHIARO: Okay. Sorry.

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BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You
may continue. Finish please.

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DAVE CHIARO: Okay. So Nassau and
Suffolk as well as Westchester and Onondaga did not
conduct disparity studies either. However, I will
put the caddy up that Nassau may have just instituted
it because they were reaching out for a company to do
it and that was the middle of last year but then of
course the pandemic and I will read directly from Ken
Williams what he sent regarding disparity studies.
It's a thank you for your service program not a
disparity program so no study was or will be done.
So, essentially for the veteran aspect and just to
clarify for both chairs, a veteran is receipt of a
DD-214. They could either have been past service or
they could be current service, because I know at the
beginning of this hearing they were asking about past
service as well as current service. With the
possession of a DD-214, you are a veteran.

CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: I want to thank
you for that and I'm hopeful that I can get something
in writing that can further elaborate on any points
that you may haven't had time to.

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DAVE CHIARO: Uh, the only thing I can say Mr. Chair is the law is already written for the MWBEs and obviously not in the legislative type business by going ahead and putting a space next to the MWBE and putting SDOV or veteran, you will go ahead and you will be able to go on par and do exactly what you've been saying because as you were talking I was making some notes and I, and one of the notes that you made when you were commenting I put bingo and you were over target. You are right on target.

BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Dave, we are now going to turn to our next panelist, Peter Kempner. Peter, you may begin when the Sergeant at Arms starts the clock.

SGT. JONES: Time starts now. 2:03:01

PETER KEMPNER: Thank you and good afternoon. My name is Peter Kempner and I'm the legal director in volunteers of legal service also known as VOLS. For over 20 years the VOLS micro-enterprise project has helped existing and aspiring small businesses and micro-entrepreneurs access high-quality legal services. For many New Yorkers owning a small business is an effective path out of poverty

1 and into financial stability and independence. VOLS
2 provides assistance for drafting contracts, reviewing
3 government documents, protecting intellectual
4 property, and advising on commercial leases. We
5 partner with community and economic development and
6 organizations to connect with clients who would
7 benefit from our legal assistance, focusing on
8 minority women, immigrant and veteran owned
9 businesses. Our micro-enterprise project works
10 together with our veterans' initiative to connect
11 with veteran service organizations to help identify
12 and serve veteran entrepreneurs and small business
13 owners. We helped them identify their legal needs
14 and create an action plan to address them, for
15 providing our access to clients with access to high-
16 quality pro bono attorneys and our partners. We
17 strive to level the playing field for veteran small
18 business owners. Unfortunately, free legal services
19 for veterans, small business owners and entrepreneurs
20 is extremely scarce. Volunteer attorneys and small
21 legal services programs like ours could only meet a
22 small fraction of the community's needs. VOLS is one
23 of three non-profit legal service providers that
24 participate in SBSs commercial lease assistant
25

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2 program and this program is, is really innovative by
3 providing three non-litigation legal assistance for
4 representation of commercial tenants facing
5 commercial lease challenges but this program is
6 limited to pre-litigation services and only to
7 matters regarding commercial leases. SBS clearly
8 recognizes the importance of legal counsel to small
9 business owners in the commercial lease area and that
10 should be applauded. But, legal services for small
11 businesses is not only limited to commercial leases
12 and it does not meet the community's needs. Small
13 business owners face a wide range of legal needs.
14 There are entrepreneurs who may need legal assistance
15 with corporate entity selection, with business
16 formation, intellectual property, contract review,
17 regulatory compliance and employment matters, just to
18 name some of the most frequent issues that we see.
19 Funding free legal services for veteran entrepreneurs
20 beyond commercial lease assistance could make the
21 difference for so many veterans who's businesses are
22 in their infancy. Building on, the SBS run NYC
23 business solution centers, which offer legal advising
24 as part of the package of services to veteran
25

1 entrepreneurs, the city should develop a more
2 comprehensive and robust legal support program.

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4 SGT. JONES: Time expired.

5 PETER KEMPNER: For veteran
6 entrepreneurs. If I could just have one more moment
7 please, including access to free full representation,
8 legal services can ensure that veterans are able to
9 start their small businesses on a strong footing and
10 have the proper support if they face legal challenges
11 as they build their businesses. Chair Gjonaj, you
12 mentioned this but New York State and New York City
13 have a long history of creating programs and funding
14 services for veteran entrepreneurs. The, the vending
15 license program that you mentioned, actually dates
16 back to 1896 and was intended to benefit disabled
17 veterans of the United States Civil War. These
18 vending licenses preferences for disabled veterans
19 have endured for over 125 years and continue to give
20 economic opportunities to entrepreneurial veterans.
21 Our city's veterans represent the best of what we
22 have to offer and we should continue to strive to
23 give them all the support they need upon their return
24 home and as they build their economic futures. Thank
25 you for allowing us to submit this testimony.

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2 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
3 you so much Peter. We will now be hearing from
4 Robert. Robert, when the Sergeant starts the time,
5 you may begin.

6 SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

7 ROBERT PIECHOTA: Good afternoon all, Rob
8 Piechota here, I'm with the Small Business
9 Administration. I'm located on Long Island but I
10 cover a lot of the metro-New York area stuff
11 regarding veterans. I've been here almost three
12 years and I come from the Small Business Development
13 Center world in New York City where I advised veteran
14 business owners and I was the sort of the subject
15 matter expert regarding recruiting veteran
16 entrepreneurs as well as helping them get where they
17 wanted to go. So, I got a lot of traction with this.
18 You know, when we all got up this morning, we all
19 reached over and put on the radio and maybe the TV
20 and the same station came on, WIISM. We all play it,
21 whether you want to admit it or not, it's What's In
22 It For Me. And I'm speaking to you today as an
23 advocate for veterans. I submitted testimony that's
24 regarding the SBA only and all the services and the
25 great stuff that we do so that's available on the

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2 record. But in light of the conversation from our
3 co-chairs and my fellow panelists, I wanted to
4 mention a couple of things. What's in it for me?
5 Why do veterans want to do business in New York City?
6 There is one thing and one thing only in my opinion,
7 from my experience, and that's the marketplace. You
8 know, a lot of people want to move out of the city,
9 want to move out of the state but the market here in
10 New York is second to none. But regarding anything
11 else, I'm a veteran, why do I want to self-identify
12 in New York City? It's, it's pretty scarce. I had
13 the same conversation, I was exposed to the same
14 discussion way back in 2011. We had the same
15 discussion, SBS was being drilled by the co-Chairs
16 for Small Business as well as the Veteran Committee
17 and the same sort of conclusions came up and at the
18 time it was, well we don't want to have a special
19 deal for veterans because there are not that many
20 here. They actually arranged for a, a study to be
21 done, I believe it was Price, Water, House, Cooper
22 and it was a horrible study. I don't want to be
23 little that company but was poorly done, they sampled
24 about maybe 25 people, 25 business owners to figure
25 out how many small business owners we had that were

1 veterans in New York City and the data wasn't there,
2 they couldn't find it. Nobody self-identifies, why
3 would they bother, it's a hassle. And, and I got to
4 commit I was here when MOVA was around I saw the
5 transition from MOVA to DVS. You know, the
6 Commissioner being a small business owner himself and
7 going through the, the process with incubators, he
8 gets it. You know, you can't throw money at any of
9 this stuff, you've got to build capabilities. I
10 would love to see a world where the next
11 administration comes in, maybe with some of the
12 leadership we have on board right now, identify a way
13 to combine some of the skills and services between
14 SBS, the City, OGS and the state as well as the
15 federal government. There's a lot of great things
16 out there but you just cannot find them,
17 opportunities contracting why? Because we're in a
18 virtual world right now, why can't we work together
19 and offer great education online. You know somebody
20 out on Farmingdale, one of the best veteran advisors
21 that we have, I think in the country, David Ciara
22 (SP) works at ASDBC and why can't he do ...

24 SGT. JONES: Time expired.

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ROBERT PIECHOTA: Give me a second. Why can't he do virtual training if we do some kind of needs assessment? You can't just throw money and say we want to have veteran business owners, we want to have a system, an ecosystem where we actually bring people in, they want to, they see the advantage and maybe there's a, there's a, some kind of aspirational goal program set up for veteran owned businesses where we make it attractive for people to want to stay in the city and become an entrepreneur. I'll stop there. Thank you so much for convening this, this event and I'll always be available with any kind of questions that you may have now or in the future.

BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Robert. I will now turn it over to Chair Dinowitz for questions that you have for this panel.

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Well, I'll start with, we'll start with Chair Gjonaj if that's?

BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No worries. Chair Gjonaj.

CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: I'm good. I just want to thank all that participated and encouraged to help get the word out. I see the posting, it's up to 72 hours after the end of the

1 hearing that veterans can submit their written
2 testimony. So, if you know of anyone that was not
3 afforded, did not know about this hearing, they still
4 can submit their testimony in writing and it will
5 become a part of the record. It only helps. Thank
6 you.
7

8 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
9 you so much. Chair Dinowitz, do you have any
10 questions for this panel?

11 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Uh, no, not
12 at this time.

13 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay.
14 I will now ask if there are any questions from
15 Council Members. As a reminder, if Council Members
16 have questions for a particular panelist, they should
17 use the Zoom Raise Hand Function at this time. Okay.
18 I don't see any hands raised. I'm going to do a last
19 call. If we had inadvertently missed anyone that had
20 registered to testify today and has yet to have been
21 called on, please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function
22 now and you'll be called in the order that your hand
23 has been raised. All right. I think we got everyone
24 so I'm going to turn it over to Chair Dinowitz for
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1 closing remarks and then Chair Dinowitz you may be
2 give closing remarks. Chair Dinowitz.

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4 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Yes. Thank
5 you Bianca. First, as always I want to thank our
6 service members, our veterans and their families of
7 course, my Co-Chair, Chair Gjonaj. Commissioner
8 Hendon thank you for attending and for staying to
9 listen to our panelists. Deputy Commissioner Gross
10 and Chief of Staff Francis and of course the staff,
11 Bianca Vitale, Elizabeth Arts, Sylvester Bachi (SP),
12 Jenna Claus (SP), Mike Corbitz and Sabrina Campbell.
13 You know we always say thank you to our veterans. We
14 start and end every meeting by saying thank you to
15 our veterans, service members and families but we
16 always have to ask, you know, what does thank you
17 look like and in the city of New York, I think it
18 means ensuring that our veterans, our entrepreneur
19 veterans are given the support they need. And while
20 there's clearly work that has been done a lot of
21 effort is being made and we have, you know,
22 Commissioners who's hearts are in the right place and
23 are doing their darneest to do a lot of work, we
24 clearly as a city have a lot more to do to ensure
25 that our veterans are supported and recognized for

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2 putting their lives on the line for our country, our
3 freedoms and to their families for making that
4 sacrifice as their loved ones went off to serve. So,
5 I look forward to continued conversation, continued
6 work to ensure that that thank you are not just empty
7 words but the thank yous are actually actions in, in
8 terms of supporting our veterans.

9 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair
10 Gjonaj?

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Chair Dinowitz
12 I want to thank you for co-Chairing this hearing and
13 I'm hopeful that you are going to continue to build
14 on the hearing in the new Administration and with our
15 new colleagues. Commissioner Hendon, I want to thank
16 you. It's not too often that Commissioners stay on
17 the entire hearing so it's commendable but I expect
18 nothing less of that of a veteran who understands
19 first one in and last one out mentality. To the
20 veterans, it's more than thank you. The city has to
21 show you how much we appreciate your sacrifice and
22 your service. The only way we can truly do that is
23 by creating that ecosystem that you continue to
24 thrive and this is no secret, our veterans' service
25 did not end with their tour. They continue to come

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2 back into the communities and give back and build on
3 the, on the base that they find, doing the expertise
4 and devotion and commitment with them. So, I'm
5 grateful and I'm looking forward to working on more
6 veterans calling New York City home than ever before
7 but that begins with New York City making it a home
8 for veterans to call home. So, thank you again.

9 BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
10 you Chair Dinowitz, do you want to gavel us out and
11 conclude this hearing?

12 CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: The meeting
13 is concluded. (gavel pounding) Thank you.

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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 27, 2022