

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
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PAUL A. VALLONE
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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

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JOHANNA M. CASTRO: Go live.

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

SGT. JONES: The cloud has started.

SGT. MARTINEZ: Okay.

SGT. PEREZ: Backup recording is rolling.

SGT. MARTINEZ: Pardon me with that.

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Good morning.

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

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

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

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

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

1 navigate available resources. A 2020 study conducted
2 by the Syracuse University Institute for Veteran
3 Military Families concerning veteran entrepreneurship
4 found that 33% of the respondents could not afford
5 the long-term capital to start a business. I fear
6 that the financial devastation caused by the pandemic
7 on small businesses has further exacerbated these
8 barriers that veteran entrepreneurs can face. If
9 veteran-owned businesses have difficulty in normal
10 times navigating available resources and accessing
11 capital it may have been extremely challenging for
12 veteran businesses to access the various City, State
13 and Federal financial elite programs during the
14 pandemic. I am confident DVS and SBS were aware that
15 the unique challenges veteran entrepreneurs face
16 become more acute during the pandemic and I look
17 forward to hearing from the Administration on the
18 steps it took to support these patriotic Americans.
19 SBS and DVS do have a number of programs that assist
20 veteran entrepreneurs. SBS offers a boot camp of
21 Veterans that help veterans apply skills they
22 developed in the military to building a successful
23 and profitable business. DVS and SBS encourage
24 applicable veteran business owners to certify their
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businesses by applying to the emerging business enterprise or EBE program or the Minority Women owned Business Enterprise MWBE program. A certified business have greater access to contracting opportunities with City Agencies. Entrepreneurial veterans that use DVS Vets Connect NYC can also be connected to a DVS Care Coordinator that can help Veteran New Yorkers apply to find the, funding opportunities and training programs at the State and Federal level while appreciate the Administration is addressing unique concerns Veteran New Yorkers face in owning and operating a small business. The purpose of our oversight hearing today is to understand how productive these program are in addressing Veteran concerns and whether they are sufficient. How many veterans participate in the SBS Veteran focused Business Boot Camp. How many veterans does SBS administer annually? How many boot camp programs? Does SBS and DVS help businesses register as EBE or WMBE? How many veterans are calling Vet Connect NYC for help with finding opportunities? We are aware that navigating available resources can be challenging for veteran 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.

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

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Committee Counsel Bianca Vitale to go over some
procedural items.

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

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

JAMES HENDON: I do.

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

QUAMID FRANCIS: I do.

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

DYNISHAL GROSS: I do.

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

JAMES HENDON: Thank you so much. Uh,
first off, good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, Chair
Gjonaj, Committee Members also Council Member Brooks-
Powers and, and advocates. My name is James Hendon
and I'm proud to serve as the Commissioner for the
New York City Department of Veteran Services, or DVS,
joined by DVS Deputy Commissioner, Quamid Francis who
oversees agency-wide operations and New York City
Small Business Services, Deputy Commissioner Dynishal
Gross who oversees the Division of Economic and
Finance Opportunity at SBS. I welcome this
opportunity to testify about entrepreneurialship
resources and services for Veteran Small Business
Owners. You know, according to the University of
Syracuse and J.P. Morgan report titled the State of
Veteran Entrepreneurialship, what we know and next
steps. Veteran entrepreneurialship dropped by 33%
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 accredit 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
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greater share of greater owned businesses sought loans of \$100,000 or less. One explanation for lower approval rates among veterans to be a mis-match in the lender from which the financing was sought. To address the needs outlined in the report referenced above and the report completed by our partners at the New York City Department of Small Business Services, titled A Roadmap for Supporting Veteran Owned Businesses. DVS partnered with the institute for veterans and military families, coalition of veteran owned businesses and First Data Center of Excellent for Veteran entrepreneurship to host the DVS best source of Vet at Google Grow with Google Learning Center in October of 2019. Vet stores brought veteran and military spouse entrepreneurs together with procurement executives from some of the largest companies around the country for a day of procurement, focused panel discussions, networking, resource connections and break-out sessions. This event helped veteran and military spouse owned businesses gain valuable resources, information and best practices around corporate, supply, diversity and both private and public procurement readiness to help them grow their companies and find supply

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

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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 entrepreneurship 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.

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.

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CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you and before I begin I just want to acknowledge Council Member Vallone has joined us at the hearing. Commissioner you just mentioned the number of businesses that appear on the map but how many, does that include every veteran owned business in New York City and if now how many Veteran owned businesses are there in New York City?

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Right so.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you.

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
25

1 have, we still have many veterans who do not self-
2 identify and we are talking about this in the
3 business context but we could speak to this in other
4 context also, Mr. Chair, in that I don't want
5 anything special. I don't want any special
6 treatment, any additional attention, I don't want it,
7 you know, I don't want anybody to look at me any
8 different, you know, from the other person so you've
9 got to deal with that also. So, I fear that we may
10 never get a handle on all 953. Um, you know, I'd
11 argue another piece of this too on the outreach side
12 and I'm going to defer to Deputy Commissioner Francis
13 and Deputy Commissioner Gross to add to this, is to
14 do it in the smartest way possible in this era of
15 COVID where you have people who are changed how
16 they've operated and how they have worked in general
17 and this crosses verticals for us on the veterans
18 side as far as how do we conduct outreach in a new
19 normal way. you may have a business who says look
20 I'm going to try to set something up where it's very
21 completely virtual so I may not be the person that
22 you'll at an in person gathering or I'm someone who
23 is approaching it from the perspective of I've left
24 my W-2 job. I want to start my own thing and I don't
25

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.
8

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

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

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

1
2 DYNISHAL GROSS: I, um, so certainly in
3 our certification programs we recognize that any firm
4 coming into our certification programs, that those
5 programs exist because those firms have been
6 historically excluded from procurement opportunities
7 and capacity building one on one technical
8 assistance, intensive technical assistance are part
9 of the design of those programs. We're not expecting
10 that business owners are going to, you know, jump,
11 into you know procurement with a City as large and
12 complex as New York City without those supports and
13 so, you know, we're...

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

17 DYNISHAL GROSS: Sure.

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

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

1
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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CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you. I want to turn it over the Chair Gjonaj for his questions at this point. Thank you.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: 210.

JAMES HENDON: 808.

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

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

DYNISHAL GROSS: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you
Commissioner.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1
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

1
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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our P-tach services and this year, so far, we've served 41 veteran owned businesses and 68 instances of technical assistance and capacity building within my division and SBS alone. Last year, we provided 140 technical assistance services to veteran owned businesses in my division of SBS alone. And of course, SBS's majority investments in veterans are in our workforce programs where we've served more than 24,000 veterans and their spouses since July 2012. So, um, through work with DVS, other partner entities, um, and smart marketing investments, we are managing to reach these veterans and recruit them into the programs. We want to do more and we're committed to doing more in partnership but I don't think we're missing the mark altogether. Those numbers tell me a different service.

CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Deputy

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

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

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

DYNISHAL GROSS: Great.

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

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

DYNISHAL GROSS: That's right.

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

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

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

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

7
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?

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Okay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DYNISHAL GROSS: That's my belief.

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

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

COMMITTEE COUNSEL BIANCA VITALE: Sure.

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

any follow up questions to ask of the, the admin
panel, then we'll turn to public testimony?

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

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

disadvantaged as a group so by establishing military service they establish that prong of identity in a social group that has been historically disadvantaged. But the EBE program also requires a proof of economic disadvantage. In the EBE program we have a personal network limitation of \$1 million and so they need to show that their personal net worth does not exceed that and also that they've experienced some disadvantage in business related to their, the social category that they're part of so. So, that they have experienced some disadvantage in business related to their status as a veteran. You know, that could be, they share a narrative with our team, um, about that social disadvantage. So, for example, it could be that repeated deployments have impaired their ability to develop credit that would allow them to finance their business or that the actual stops and starts in their ability to run their, operate the business or gain clients due to their military service. There might have been discrimination related to their service in a particular, in a particular war. Um, so for every applicant to EBE they're sharing an individual 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 and, and again if they're not eligible for that
2 certification program, they are still gaining
3 supports through our P-TACH.
4

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.
24
25

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

19
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

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

1 to do business with the City. If I can show more of
2 our people who have worked to try to do business with
3 the City, we can say, here's the number of veterans
4 who pride this and here's what's happened as far as
5 outcomes. There's reason for us to have some sort of
6 special program akin to what we see for our minority
7 and women owned businesses and the EBEs. Then it
8 makes it all the easier for this to just lock in, but
9 right now we're not there and that's why we keep
10 talking about this map and talking about trying to
11 get more people in it, talking about trying to engage
12 them about doing business with the city so we have
13 data to come back and say I remember that and say
14 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 whatever, no matter what committee I've ever sat on
2 it's always been this interagency cooperation issue
3 and it's not necessarily DVS fault or.
4

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, EO65 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

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

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

1
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

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

1
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

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

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

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

1 were won by our state certified SDVOB. And, and we
2 had a portion of those that had currently gained MWBE
3 or EBE certification and we've been working to
4 increase that proportion. So, it's not the case that
5 veteran owned businesses are not succeeding in city
6 procurement. We know that they could succeed at a
7 higher rate with more technical assistance and with
8 more access to the certification programs but they
9 are able to access to those opportunities and on our
10 last analysis they were succeeding at the tune of \$82
11 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 other organizations. That's the point that I'm
2 trying to make and I didn't want to be that direct
3 but I guess it is. I have no more questions and I
4 want to thank, I hope the Commissioner and Deputy
5 Commissioner will stay on as we hear from some of the
6 others that are going to testify and I'm sure
7 they'll, they'll have ideas as well as suggestions
8 that perhaps the next administration can implement.
9

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: Thank you.

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

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

SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

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

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

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

SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

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

BIANCA VITALE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're
good.

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

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

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

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

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

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

LT. COL. RON WATSON: Mm-hmm.

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

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

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

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

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

SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

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

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

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

25

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

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

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

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

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

SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

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

1 And very quickly, we mentioned about tax breaks. I as
2 a veteran received a tax break like Ron Watson had
3 mentioned. I can go anywhere out of the City of New
4 York. Anywhere outside the City and I've had this
5 conversation with Councilman Gjonaj. Outside the
6 City I can walk in to the town clerk or any of the
7 municipal offices anywhere outside the five boroughs
8 and I can get a list of, of veterans that are
9 receiving tax break. You cannot do that in the city
10 of New York. I have tried unsuccessfully.

11 Department of Finance will not release that
12 information no matter who asks for it. I've had
13 Councilman Gjonaj ask for it, I've had Assemblyman
14 Bonodono (SP) ask for it, none of that will be
15 released. None of that is available. So that puts
16 not only DVS at a disadvantage of identifying those
17 veterans that are receiving those tax breaks but also
18 puts folks like me that would like to garner member
19 to my organization. I would like to see maybe in the
20 next session the City Council maybe address that
21 issue and I, maybe release that information. Those
22 are the two things that I, two issues that I wanted
23 to discuss. Thank you all very much and I look
24
25

forward to working in the future with Chairman
Dinowitz.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON ERIC DINOWITZ: No. No
additional questions.

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

SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

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

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

have a service disabled federal level at that level.

Now we move down to state level. There is no veteran

certification at the state level. There is a service

disabled veteran owned certification and then when we

move down to counties, especially in the State of New

York, currently there are only four counties that

have a nesting view be it service disabled veteran

owned business I'll call incentive and that would be

Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester and Onondaga Counties.

So, during all of the testimony that I was listening

to before, New York City can be an addition to those

four counties, getting those five counties on board

and again referring back to this Vet Con and

conversation with many administrators so for

instance, Ken Williams who is the State certifier at

New York State Office of General Services.

Essentially we had, we had gotten it down very

simplistically to say, you know what, the MWBE exists

at the federal level, the MWBE exists at the state

level, the MWBE exists at the county level, so,

without the disparity study which by the way, New

York State did not conduct a disparity study, nor did

Nassau or Suffolk.

SGT. JONES: Time expired.

DAVE CHIARO: Okay. Sorry.

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

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.

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

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

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

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

SGT. JONES: Time expired.

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

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

SGT. JONES: Time starts now.

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

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

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.

1
2 ROBERT PIECHOTA: Give me a second. Why
3 can't he do virtual training if we do some kind of
4 needs assessment? You can't just throw money and say
5 we want to have veteran business owners, we want to
6 have a system, an ecosystem where we actually bring
7 people in, they want to, they see the advantage and
8 maybe there's a, there's a, some kind of aspirational
9 goal program set up for veteran owned businesses
10 where we make it attractive for people to want to
11 stay in the city and become an entrepreneur. I'll
12 stop there. Thank you so much for convening this,
13 this event and I'll always be available with any kind
14 of questions that you may have now or in the future.

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

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

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

22 CHAIRPERSON MARK GJONAJ: I'm good. I
23 just want to thank all that participated and
24 encouraged to help get the word out. I see the
25 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
25

1 closing remarks and then Chair Dinowitz you may be
2 give closing remarks. Chair Dinowitz.

3
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

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

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

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

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

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

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