

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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March 12, 2018

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HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Justin L. Brannan
Mathieu Eugene
Alan N. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone

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

Loree Sutton, Commissioner
NYC Department of Veterans Services

Jeff Roth, Deputy Commissioner & Lieutenant Colonel
NY Army National Guard & Veteran of City Service

Eric Henry, General Counsel & Director of
Intergovernmental Affairs
NYC Department of Veterans Services

Nicole Branca, Assist. Commissioner & Senior Advisor
Housing and Support Services
NYC Department of Veterans Services

Darlene Brown-Williams, Assistant Commissioner
Whole Health and Community Resilience
New York City Department of Veterans Services

Melissa Walters, Director of Core4 Model
New York City Department of Veterans Services

Jamal Hoffman, Assistant Commissioner of Employment,
Entrepreneurship, Education, Events & Engagement
New York City Department of Veterans Services

Joe Hunt, U.S. Army veteran & Director Veterans
Mental Health Coalition of New York City

Corey Ortega, Director, Civic & Government Affairs
New York City Veterans Alliance

Lisa Carling, Director, TDF Accessibility Programs

Jonathan Weinstein, Suicide Prevention Coordinator
Samaritan Suicide Prevention Center

Jacqueline Sullivan, Senior Staff Attorney
Veterans Justice Project
Bronx Legal Services, Legal Services NYC

Towaki Kotawa (sp?)

Coco Culhane, Veteran Advocacy Project
Urban Justice Center

Kaitlin Hosey, Live on New York

[sound check, pause] [background
comments, pause]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet down please.
Set your telephones to vibration. Thank you much.
[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Good afternoon,
everyone and welcome to the City Council Committee on
Veterans Fiscal 2019 Preliminary Budget hearing. I
am Councilman Chaim Deutsch, Chair of the Veterans
Committee. Today, we will be hearing from Loree
Sutton, the Commissioner of the Department of
Veterans Services or DVS. The department's Fiscal
2019 Preliminary Budget totals \$4.6 million including
\$3.5 million in personnel services funding to support
41 full-time positions. DVS is organized into four
program areas: Central Administration, Community
Outreach, Mental Health Services and Homeless
Prevention. The department, which is only in its
second fiscal year of operation represents an
important institution in ensuring that the voices of
New York City's over 200,000 veterans are heard, and
that their concerns are addressed. I would like to
thank Commissioner Sutton for her efforts in
establishing this institution in such a short period

of time, and I would like to thank my colleague the former chair of the committee Eric Ulrich for sponsoring the bill that brought DVS into existence. Now that DVS is up and running, it is our job to work together to make sure that we are using the resources that are available to address those matters that are most pressing for our veteran population, and identify the best policies at our disposal to address these issues head on. With that goal in mind, that—we would like to gain a clearer understanding of the DVS' efforts to identify what are the most pressing concerns for New York City's veteran community, what actions the department has taken to confront these concerns, and how DVS' work is being prioritized. We would also like to develop a better picture of how the department is tracking the outcomes of its efforts and identifying which strategies are working and which aren't. To that point, I would like to thank the Department of Veterans Services for including a section in the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report or PMMR, which is a critical tool in tracking agency performance. We would like to learn more at this hearing how DVS plans to bolster its section of the PMMR and MMR in upcoming

renditions to further expand its usefulness. For the effort in putting together today's hearing, I'd like to thank our dedicated committee staff, Zack Harris, Michael Kurtz, and Kaitlyn Fahey. I would also like to acknowledge the members of the committee who are present. We have Council Member Paul Vallone. Thank you Commissioner for testifying today before us today. I would like to now ask the Committee Counsel to swear in the Commissioner.

LEGAL COUNSEL: Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and answer questions honestly put before you today?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, I do.

LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Good afternoon, Chair Deutsch, Council Member Vallone, members of the staff of Committee on Veterans and allies as well as veteran advocates of New York City. My name is Loree Sutton. I have the privilege of serving as the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Veterans Services. I am joined today by our Deputy Commission Jeff Roth, a Lieutenant Colonel in the New York Army National Guard, and an 11-year veteran of city service as well as by Eric Henry, our General

Counsel, and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs.

At this moment, we'd also like to welcome you, Chair

Deutsch, to your new position. Congratulations as

well as the newly installed members of the Committee

on Veterans as well as those like Council Member

Vallone who are stalwart members who are continuing

to serve. We would also like to thank former chair

Eric Ulrich and previous members of the committee for

their work in pushing forward the interest of

veterans and their families in New York City. Thank

you for this opportunity today to meet and discuss

DVS' Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2019. Each

Fiscal Year presents the opportunity to take stock at

how far we have come, examine the city's resources

and to make decisions that ensure we continue

delivery of the support that our veterans and their

families across the five boroughs have so admirably

earned. We are confident the upcoming budget talks

will translate into a financial plan that will enable

DVS and the City of New York to continue as a

national model for serving those who have so bravely

served our nation. In 2015, New York City Council

passed historic legislation, which was then signed

into law by Mayor Bill de Blasio in the form of Local

Law 113 to create a branch of our city government dedicated to building the strongest foundation possible for connecting veterans and their families with high quality services across a variety of needs. In 2016, the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs transitioned into a full citywide agency specifically devoted to the wellbeing and support of veterans and their families now know as the New York City Department of Veterans Services. During enduring collaboration, we are strengthening our veterans and their family members' capacity for and commitment continued service within our city. That indeed is our North Star. As the first new agency in the city of New York in over 15 years, DVS has diligently worked to onboard a talented and diverse group of professionals many of whom are here in the gallery with us today to match resources with veteran needs. Since April of 2016, the agency has grown to a staff of 36 individuals and is well on its way to hiring the additional professionals, which will bring us to a total of 41 DVS team members. In FY18, approximately \$4.3 million in funding was allocated under the agency's budget for staffing and programmatic functions. Core to DVS is the belief

that veterans and their families are out city's leading natural renewable resource and their strength and demonstrated commitment to public service will help New York City thrive. Veterans consistently tell the agency that navigating services is one of the biggest challenges in accessing the appropriate services. So, at DVS we take the trial and error out of navigation. DVS works with veterans one on one to help them figure out what benefits they might be eligible for, and how to get access to services through three main lines of action as follows: Housing and Support Services led by Assistant Commissioner and Senior Advisor Nicole Branca with us today. Whole Health and Community Resilience led by Assistant Commissioner Darlene Brown-Williams, also with us today as well as with her new Director of the Core4 Model. Melissa, thank you so much for joining the team. Melissa Walters comes to us from Health and Hospital Corp and we are really excited about your background as well. City Employment, Entrepreneurship, Education, Events and Engagement led by Assistant Commissioner Jamal Hoffman, also here today. Starting with HHS, Housing and Support Services, the Housing and Support

Services Unit is dedicated to effectively ending veteran homelessness in New York City. HHS leads and supports initiatives to expand and improve housing and social service resources available to New York City veterans and their families and provides assistance to veterans navigating existing resources. Its top priority is working with homeless veterans, developing and sustaining a system that rapidly rehouses all those who become homeless and also working with DVS' public and private partners to prevent homelessness in the first place. In conjunction with the VA and a network of dedicated private partners, DVS and its city partner agencies have reduced overall veteran homelessness by 90% since 2011, almost double the national reduction during that same time period, that national reduction being 47%. In calendar year 2017 alone over 700 veterans were placed into permanent housing. DVS we're proud to say placed 168 or 24% of these veterans into their new homes. New York City also prioritized housing its most vulnerable veterans first. In December of 2015, the federal government certified New York City for ending chronic veteran homelessness. Those residing on the street or in

shelter for at least one year and whom are living with a disability. To reach these milestones, DVS developed and implemented three innovative new models. The first: Veteran Peer Coordinator Program, establishing a peer-to-peer model of veterans and veteran advocates working one-on-one to help homeless veteran navigate the incredibly challenging housing search process in New York City. Secondly, the Housing Coordination Center providing a one-stop housing placement service to affordable housing owners, and property managers managing the referrals, inspections, subsidy documentation that are needed to promptly fill vacant units with eligible tenants. In 2017, DVS added to this model a point person specifically for attracting and managing relations with private market-landlords.

Number 3: After Care and Prevention: Ensuring that recently housed veterans and their landlords receive the support they need for a successful transition back into housing, and that all veterans at risk of homeless have someone who can steer them towards assistance. Additionally, the Housing and Support Services Unit continues to develop new programs and policies to reach our hardest to house veterans. For

example, this year DVS partnered with the New York City Housing Authority on a federal pilot program to provide special Section 8 vouchers known as HUD VASH vouchers for those who had previously been ineligible for the voucher because of their discharge status. DVS is committed to continuing this work with our city, state, federal and community partners expanding and improving the resources and systems necessary to effectively end veteran homelessness in New York City.

Moving on to our second line of action, Whole Health and Community Resilience. DVS is actively working in support of First Lady Chirlane McCray's pioneering Mental Health Roadmap ThriveNYC to overcome stigma, foster engagement and connect individuals to professional services. The Vets ThriveNYC Whole Health Program is the DVS veteran focused complement to the ThriveNYC Mental Health Roadmap. The goal of Vets ThriveNYC is to improve the lives of New York City veterans and their families by enhancing access to a comprehensive range of services specifically tailored to their needs and strengths with a targeted focus on a coordinated integration of clinical and holistic services incorporating peer social support, cultural

engagement and the arts that address—that address the full impact of war upon the human mind, body and spirit. The Vets ThriveNYC Whole Health Program consist of two components:

Number 1: The ThriveNYC Veteran Outreach Team. The Whole Health and Community Resilience Veteran Outreach team is committed to community engagement with New York City veterans and their families to increase social engagement and help seeking behaviors in the context of a peer based support model. The WHC Our Veteran Outreach Team supports all veterans regardless of discharge status, military or veteran caregivers and their families. The multi-pronged outreach approach is designed to engage the full scope of our veterans and their families' lives. Outreach activities and the corresponding ThriveNYC guiding principles they support.

Number 2: The Core4 Whole Health Model. You'll see here we brought the model here over to your left, our right that demonstrates the four domains. This model is a non-linear dynamic model featuring four domains:

C-1: The base of this pyramid, Cultural Engagement and the Arts;

C-2: Is connection via peer social support;

C-3: Community Holistic Services; and

C-4: Clinical treatment.

Each domain of the Core4 Whole Health Model includes a DVS Outreach Team lead, a community lead expert and a set of domain-specific programs and strategies. Collectively, this group works together to engage veteran services members, veteran caregivers, and the broader New York City community. Grounded in the Six Guiding Principles of the ThriveNYC Mental Health Roadmap, the WHCR teams multi-pronged outreach approach, and the Core4 Whole Health Model programs have engaged veterans since September 2016 by:

1. Changing the culture. Through Mental Health First Aid trainings, which focus on increasing awareness of mental health concerns and connection to services through education, DVS has trained six members of its Whole Health Team as certified Mental Health First Aid instructors. These—the instructors have trained over 200 members

of the New York City community in either adult or the veterans and military family Mental Health First Aid training. We have completed training to over 20 New York City agency veteran liaisons staff at the New York City Department of Transportation as well as training 95% of our DVS internal staff in the Veteran and military family Mental Health First Aid Training.

2. Secondly, closing treatment gaps.

In conjunction with NYC 311, DVS ensured the connection of over 260 veterans to mental health services at the VA Crisis Hotline and connected over 480 individuals to mental health resources through New York City Well, and an array of comprehensive health service provider.

3. Partnering with communities. DVS'

Theater of War project led by public artist and residents Brian Dorries is a two-year collaborative project with the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the Brooklyn Public Library. In 2017, this project completed 28 performances engaging over 1,100 people through stage readings of ancient Greek plays that serve as a catalyst for town hall discussions about the challenges faced by service members, veterans, their caregivers and families.

Overall, the great majority of participants indicate that the events are impactful to them. For example, our preliminary interim program evaluation shows that 98% of attendees to Theater of War performances report that the events are at least somewhat engaging and 80% attest that they are relevant to their own lives. Attendees also believe that these events will make them at least somewhat more likely to attend other cultural events that's 97% and 94% say that they are more likely to participate in activities in the community. 91% talk about difficult topics and 85% state that they will seek help. They are more likely to seek help for themselves or someone else if necessary. Of particular importance the large majority of attendees report feeling at least somewhat more connected to other people at the event. 92% report this, and in their community in general 89%. Most attendees also note at least somewhat of an increase in their access to community resources, 76%. In 2018, the project is projected to complete 35 or more performances by year end. Next, as a member and leading model of the Senator Elizabeth Dole Foundation's Hidden Heroes Initiative the Whole Health and Community Resilience team has ensured that

our New York City military and veteran caregivers are aware of and connected to comprehensive mental health services tailored to their needs and strengths. In the spring of 2017, DVS successfully hosted an event engaging over 60 military and veterans' caregivers to ensure that those serving in the shadows receive the assistance they deserve. In February of 2018, DVS hosted a Military Caregiver Convening engaging 26 leaders who represent the diverse New York City Caregiver community. These leaders contributed greatly to the conversation of what is currently being done for caregivers in New York City, and initiatives that DVS can follow up to collaborate and to better support caregivers along their journey.

Next, Acting Early: Through the Whole Health and Community Resilience Team's community outreach efforts at satellite offices VA vet centers, New York City borough president's offices, student veterans at colleges and universities, faith based organizations, community forums and speaking engagements, DVS has engaged with nearly 6,300 individuals since its inception with this program in September of 2016.

Next, Using Data Better: Through a collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Whole Health and Community Resilience Team hosted a Virtual Implementation Academy on Advancing Suicide Prevention Best Practices in Peer Support for service members, veterans and their families. During this conference DVS convened 25 mental health service providers in the conversation on peer based suicide prevention efforts, and methods to enhance collaboration and the use of data and technical assistance from SAMSA in New York City. As a part of this process, SAMSA's Technical Assistance Center for service members, veterans and families committed to helping New York City track our outcomes related to the vital role that peer support plays in preventing suicide.

Lastly, Strengthen Government's Ability to Lead. In order to create long-term systems change, the Mayor's Office, City Council, city agencies, community partners and other branches of government are coming together to advance the goal of ThriveNYC. Mayor Bill de Blasio established the New York City Mental Health Council in March of 2016 bringing together city agencies to work on advancing

mental wellness and managing ThriveNYC initiatives.

DVS is a member of the Mental Health Council, which

meets quarterly and serves as a vehicle for

harnessing resources for multiple agencies and

sectors to achieve identified shared goals including:

1. Building a culture to improve mental health;

2. Improving the workforce; and

3. Addressing substance misuse.

Moving on to our third line of action,

City Employment, Education, Entrepreneurship,

Engagement and Events, the Department of Veterans

Services has achieved a lot in facilitating ease of

access with all levels of government. DVS is

improving access to veteran benefits by placing

community outreach specialists to serve as a direct

link between the community in each borough and DVS by

providing the human element one-on-one support.

Community Outreach Specialists are trained to connect

veterans and their families to trusted resources

available to them from the city, state and federal

governments. Deployed to the five boroughs these

specialists create a citywide presence and take

information on programs and services to veterans in

their community through collaborative partnership with host sites with six sites across five boroughs already open for business. In Calendar Year 2017, DVS engaged with over 5,740 veterans across the city at over 280 outreach events with an audience reach of nearly 6,700. This includes the assistance of over 1,700 veterans and family members one-on-one both at our main office at One Center Street and Satellite offices across the five boroughs. Our CE 5 outreach specialists also provided over 40 community briefings on behalf of the agency, as well as connected and engaged with other 600 stakeholders within the larger New York City veterans' community. In addition, DVS is executing a strategy for recruiting and connecting veterans and their families to city careers services and resources through a phased action plan aimed at:

1. Upgrading the DVS website for direct access to city job opportunities.

2. Collaborating with DCAS Citywide Recruitment and Workforce 1 in the public and private sectors to identify HR best practices.

3. Standardizing citywide intake forms to foster self-identification of veterans and families, and

4. Engaging with the veteran business community to enhance business and procurement opportunities for veteran business owners and entrepreneurs.

In the area of entrepreneurship, DVS continues to identify challenges and opportunities within the New York City veteran business community. The many challenges include a lack of mentoring, networking and access to procurement opportunities. DVS is committed to help meet these challenges and is collaborating with the private sector towards the creation of a New York City veteran business coalition. This coalition of business leaders, veteran entrepreneurs and businesses not for profit and government agencies slated to launch later this year, plans to come together to improve procurement opportunities, business creation and expansion, human talent acquisition and access to capital for veterans. DVS regularly engages with the Veterans Advisory Board or VAB. Appointed by the Mayor and the Council Speaker, the VAB is strategically selected to sustain a diverse range of service backgrounds, community engagement interests and professional expertise to help facilitate dialogue

within the New York City veterans' community. DVS is currently compiling candidates for the next round of VAB mayoral appointments. I encourage everyone to access the 2017 VAB End of Year Report and meeting minutes available on the DVS website, which provides a series of 2017's Veterans Highlights at the city level, as well as policy and information gathering recommendations to the City Council and the City of New York. I greatly appreciate the work which went into this document led by Chair of the VAB Todd Haskins, as this document really reflects the passion and deep commitment the VAB and its members hold toward moving forward the interest and improving the lives of New York City Veterans and their families. The City has also—correction—the agency has also made tremendous strides in utilizing multiple platforms to facilitate communication between the veterans' community, the larger New York City population and municipal government. Since September of 2016, the New York City Department of Veterans Services expanded its outreach to constituents in a variety of ways including speaking engagements, generating content, securing media coverage, engaging social media audiences and reaching diverse audiences

through print materials. In accordance with Local Law 42, DVS conducts annual trainings for established liaisons within city agencies to advise veteran employees, applicable military benefits, services and personnel policies. The most recent training occurred in August of 2017, and DVS conducts quarterly check-in calls with these liaisons. DVS is committed to seeking out new avenues for collaboration and cross-sector initiatives to leverage the strengths and report—and support the needs of New York City's veterans and their families. During Fleet Week 2017, DVS launched a mentoring initiative, which brings together 25 different service providers in an effort to collectively identify and address the peer-to-peer needs of veterans and their families. In addition, we are concluding a listening tour at present as part of the Veterans on Campus Initiative, a collaborative of post-secondary institutions and education expert who aim to share best practices and create new opportunities that will enhance the student veteran experience here in New York City. The department is actively building upon the pioneering work led by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and its Task Force

on Behavioral Health in the Criminal Justice System.

For example, DVS is working with partners in the New York City of Department of Correction, the DA, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and legal services organizations to help stand up a veterans-only housing unit on Rikers Island. This unit staffed by veteran correction officers will provide access to legal, therapeutic and peer mentoring resources to aid in the rehabilitation of veterans incarcerated at Rikers. Additionally, DVS continues its partnership with the New York City Human Resources Administration; the New York City Public Administrator's Office; the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and local veteran service organizations to ensure proper burials for unclaimed indigent veterans. Together, and thanks to the generosity of a small number of local funeral homes, over 450 indigent veterans have been given proper burials over the past decade including 79 veterans in calendar year 2017 alone, and I cannot fail to recognize the heroic efforts of Ines Adan on our team, who has taken the lead on this for years, and we consider to be just absolutely bedrock fundamental, sacred work.

Moving on to information and technological advances, in 2016, the Department of Veterans Services connected its first accounting of the veteran population in New York City. Using American Community Survey and Vet pop 2014 data extrapolations from the New York State National Guard and reserves strengths, and estimates of non-federally qualified veterans, the department delivered the first accurate veterans population estimates as well as demographic and geographic information. This work was recently recognized by Govtech, which awarded DVS Chief Information Officer Venkat Motupalli, the "Best of New York City Award in Data Analytics." DVS was one of only seven city agencies and offices out of 135 to receive this award. We encourage everyone to visit the DVS website to view the New York City veterans maps, which shows the diversity and ubiquity of veterans in New York City neighborhoods aggregated by income, era of service, age, race, education and employment. Currently, the department wide Customer Relation Management, CRM solution is now fully implemented giving us a secure database of DVS engagements. We will continue to automate additional processes over

time. We are also working with the Mayor's Office of Operations to provide a method for veterans to self-identify using new city intake forms, which should launch in the first quarter of 2018. DVS is also proud to participate in the latest Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, the PMMR highlighting the following during the first four months of Fiscal Year 2018 from July through October of 2017. First, 57 homeless veterans found permanent homes through the Veteran Peer Coordinator Program, an innovated-and innovative new model for veterans helping fellow veterans navigate the challenging process of finding and securing housing in New York City. DVS provided direct homelessness prevention assistance for 173 veterans during the reporting period. This included a combination of veterans calling and visiting DVS for assistance and proactive after care calls to formerly homes veterans that were housed through the VPC program. As part of the pioneering ThriveNYC Mental Health Roadmap, DVS engaged 2,612 veterans and their families during the first four months of Fiscal Year 2018. As a result of these interactions, DVS assisted 1,351 veterans and their families with accesses-access to resources during this reporting

period. Finally, we are excited to note that the launch of Vet Connect NYC, an innovative online platform that will connect veterans with a constellation of over 80 vetted service providers across a variety of coverage areas is anticipated in Spring 2018. In the interim, we encourage veterans and their family members to access and utilize the current incarnation of this platform NYserves, which has been live since January of 2015. The City of New York under the Mayor's leadership has accomplished so much for our veterans and their families. With the continued help of our partners in the New York City Council, the Mayor's Office, the Federal VA, the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, and our Veteran advocate allies we look forward to continued growth and development towards improving the lives of New York City veterans and their families. Thank you again, Chair Deutsch, and members of the Committee on Veterans for this opportunity to testify about DVS's Budget for FY19. I am pleased now to address any questions or ideas you may have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Commissioner. Wow, that was a long testimony. So,

we have also been joined by Council Member Justin Brannan, and Council Member Mathieu Eugene. Thank you. So, I think you answered the—you went to a lot of the—I think a all the programs that—that you have in DVS, which is very good. Sometimes it's very difficult to understand through a testimony. So, we're going to ask some of these questions again. So, if you could explain that, and also, first of all, I just want to say that my parents were Holocaust survivors and my father went to three concentration camps, and was liberated by the 71st Infantry Division of the United States Army. So, I owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans. If not for our veterans I would not be here today. So, I want to thank—publicly I want to thank all our veteran for liberating the tens of thousands of people who came into this country and was liberated by our veterans during the Holocaust. So, thank you for that. So, my first question is in regards to homelessness. How many homeless shelters does DVS have throughout our city that house veterans?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, so in terms of homeless shelters, actually Nicole, do you want to

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS 30
2 come up and just make sure that we get this
3 absolutely correct? [background comments, pause]
4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: [off mic]
5 Yes.
6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, we're just
7 going to swear you in.
8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: So,
9 there—
10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Swear you in.
11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Oh.
12 LEGAL COUNSEL: Do you swear to tell the
13 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and
14 answer questions honestly?
15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: I do.
16 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thanks.
17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Our four
18 Veteran Peer Coordinators are spread out through five
19 shelters and transitional facilities that have
20 homeless veterans in them. That's where most of the
21 homeless veterans in the city reside, but there are
22 especially in the family system they are spread out
23 to be in family shelters across the—the city. So,
24 most of the homeless veterans are in these five, and
25 then there's one in this shelter, two in that

shelter, and one in this shelter. So, overall it's—
there's probably about 90 shelters that house the 500
plus veterans that we have right now.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I'm sorry. How
many do you have?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: It's
about 550 on any given day.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 550 veterans. So,
you said five homeless shelters?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Most of
them are—are across five shelters, but then a lot of
them especially the family veterans are—are spread
out. One veteran might be at this shelter, another
one might be at that shelter. That's—with the
families that—so that they can say in the community
in which their schools are or jobs are, et cetera.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Which
agencies or providers run these five shelters? If
you could explain each one.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Wait, DHS
runs the large one, and I believe you're familiar
with the Borden Avenue Shelter.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And how many people
are in it or are in the shelter?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: 142. The
3 men. They also run Auburn, which is for adult
4 families. We tend to have about 20 to 30 veterans
5 that are part of adult families at any given time and
6 they're at Auburn, and then--

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Can
8 you explain what adult families are?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Sure,
10 it's when there are two people over the age of 18.
11 So, that can be a couple without children, or it can
12 be a parent, child that are both over the age of 18.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, and that is
14 run by?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: That's
16 run by DHS as well.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: DHS as well. Okay,
18 and how many--how many people are in that shelter?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: I mean
20 it's usually--it has between 20 to 30, and then
21 actually there are two more that DHS oversees that
22 has a concentration of veterans. Barbara Kleinman
23 and ERC.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, that's the
25 third and fourth shelter?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: I forgot—
3 there—there—I think there are six at this point. It
4 changes as the capacity that's available in shelter.
5 So, I would say that there are probably those four
6 now that have a high concentration of those trends,
7 and then the VA has two. So, the VA has what the—
8 it's a new contract with Patriot First. It used to
9 be called Patriot House. It's now called Patriot
10 First and those are—it's one program or two programs,
11 depending on how you look at it. It's one contract.
12 They have two sites.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Uh-hm, right if you
14 could—if you don't mind, if you could get to the—to
15 the committee exactly how many shelters there are, if
16 it's five or six, and how many—how many veterans are
17 housed in each one, and now you also mentioned that
18 there are 90 other shelters spread out, right. So,
19 and what are those shelters? What—what do they
20 consist of? Is it families, adults?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: It's the—

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]

23 Adult?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: It's—it's
25 all of that, yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, why are they so widespread out? Why are they--?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: I mean I would--I would defer to DHS to talk about their shelter planning, but--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is DHS here today?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Not to my knowledge.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: But what I'll--I'll say is that the--the only veteran specific shelter that the city has is Borden, and they have a capacity of 242 beds.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, in the six shelter and the 90--90 others you mentioned, does that consist of the 500 plus veterans that are homeless--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA:
[interposing] It--there--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --or--or--or are there more?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: There is also, there's about 30 or so veterans who are on the street at any given time, and that's included in the 550.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No, I'm asking you
is that in the six shelters--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA:
[interposing] Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --and the 90 other
shelters where you have veterans, homeless veterans,
is this totaling, all these--all these shelters is
that 500 and plus homeless veterans or more?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Within
that same number most of them are in those shelters
and then there's about 30 of the 550 veterans who are
on the street at any given time. So that would be
about 520. If the census was 550, it would be about
30 veterans on the street and 520 in shelter. That's
about two-eighths. (sic)

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yeah,
I just don't understand it. So, if you have in the
Borden Avenue--if you have 242--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --veterans there,
and this one out of six shelters, right?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, how many do you
have in the other five? Like if you--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA:

[interposing] I can get you—I can--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] If—if
we're totaling 500-

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Right.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --only 540 total
and you have six shelters and plus 90 other shelters
with this. So, it's—that would be a lot more than
540. I mean unless there's like five in each or--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: One.
Most of them just have one veteran.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Which ones have one
veteran?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Of the
90--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] of
the 90?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: --most of
them are spread out and they are—they either—it's
often because they didn't declare themselves as a
veteran when they came into the system, or they don't
know that they're a veteran until much later or
because of their discharge status for example, or
they're part of the city's commitment to keep

families in the community where the kids are in school.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, once we identify that he or she is a veteran, we—like how come we don't put all the veterans in the same facilities?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: That would be a decision that DHS would have to make about creating another veteran specific shelter.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But that one—she said there's only like one, it could be one in one of-out of those 90 shelters, right? So, it doesn't seem like a big decision.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, Mr. Chair, what—what we'd be glad to do is to provide a—a spreadsheet of the current distribution of homeless veterans across the city shelter system, and be able to provide you what the rationale is. We'll work with our DHS colleagues so we can provide a clearer understanding and your and the committee's benefit of just, you know, how the veterans are distributed and why they may be housed at a certain shelter.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, okay, so I think we have to maybe have maybe a future hearing

just to talk about this. My goal and our goal is to have all these homeless veterans taken out of the shelters and to put them into permanent housing. So, we have 60,000 homeless people throughout the city, and we still have approximately 60,000 homeless people across the city, and—but 542 or 500, a little over 500 is not a lot, and so it doesn't seem like a lot to place them into permanent housing. So, what is the turnaround time when a veteran is placed in a homeless shelter for them to be in permanent—for them to go into permanent housing?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Would you please?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Sure. So, the—I would have to get back to you with the latest average because we—we get data from DHS. We don't have access to all the information directly. The last report that I have was from a year ago, and the medium length of stay was 79 days.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Seventy-nine days, and how many days would you like from one shelter, and we'll talk about the Borden Avenue Shelter, 242, those 242 veterans are—are they in that homeless shelter for less than 79 days?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Some move
3 out quite quickly and others who, for example, are
4 living with mental illness or substance abuse or
5 whatnot that might take a little longer.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Well, what do you
7 say if you take a take the longest period of a
8 homeless person, a homeless veteran in this shelter,
9 what would you--what would you guess or what--if you
10 have the facts, what would you say?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Well, the
12 median was 79 days and the average was--I believe was
13 126 days. So, that--that--that speaks to the--some of
14 the veterans being homeless for a long time and some
15 moving out quite quickly.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you're saying
17 no one would be in that homeless shelter for more
18 than 126 days? If we go in there today, and we ask
19 if--

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA:
21 [interposing] That was the average.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is anyone there
23 like maybe there for two years, three years?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Yes, we
25 do have some--some chronic long-term stayers. I can

get you that information. I don't have that off the top of my head.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. I'm just surprised DHS is not here today, and you know something, I'm just thinking then maybe should not fall under DHS. Maybe we should have a different department within DVS to take over for DHS. Obviously, DHS has not been doing—doing a great job with our 60,000 homeless and we have a low number here. We don't have—it's not such a high number compared to how many homeless people we have throughout the city. So, I think something that we should focus on is to do something internally here with the—with the Department of Veterans Services. I know we—we have the headcounts is 41—41 positions. So, 41 full-time positions? Is that full-time positions?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That is correct.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, 41—41 full-time positions is—is—and I think the headcount is going to go up. I think we have a total of 41, right. Currently, you have 41?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: 36 on board as of today.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] 36.

So, 36 and the headcount is supposed to be 41. So, you're going to be hiring more people into DVS. So, I think we should focus on—on having this down pat, you know, when it comes to homeless veterans to knowing exactly off the back or who is where and who has mental illness, and what type of resources we have. So, one—one thing I always had is with the homeless population throughout the city you could go into one homeless shelter and find people that are homeless because they can't afford rent, and you have in the same facility people that are homeless because they have mental illness, and we can't—we need to identify each facility separately because we need to know how many—how much resources we need to put in, if it's extra professionals, mental health professionals or extra personnel to just provide security, and by having different types of categories of homeless in one facility, it's very hard to put in the resources we need without out-spending or under-spending. So, I think we need to tackle this problem within the time that a homeless veteran is in a facility and to better get them into permanent housing. So, my next question is before I go to my

colleagues, so the turnaround time you mentioned the notice is like 129 days if there are--there are homeless veterans who are there for several years. So, I believe that you have more than one or two that have been in there for a long period of time a lot more than--than they're supposed to. So, first of all, what is the rent subsidy for homeless veterans to put a homeless veteran into permanent housing?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Currently we use multiple rental subsidies. There are--there are three federal subsidies, and one, two, three city subsidies that are used most frequently with veterans.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, when does--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA:
[interposing] So the three federal are--HPD's Section 8, NYCH Section 8 and NYCHA's and then there's HUD VASH, and then we have the tree city subsidies are the LINC 4 and 5 and STEPS.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, okay. So, it's kind of confusing. So, it you have--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA:
[interposing] It is confusing.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --if you have a homeless veteran that you need to find permanent housing, it's--let's say one individual for a one-bedroom apartment, federal, state, HUD everything else, what type of subsidy does he or she receive to move into permanent house a one-bedroom and it's a veteran?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: They all--they all have different eligibility criteria. So, find the rental subsidy that--that works for them, and what their income level is and so on and so forth, and then we find them appropriate housing.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Now, what is the income level based on?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Well, the--the three federal subsidies, which are all under the Section 8 umbrella, they have a maximum of 50% Area Median Income.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Fitty percent. So, most of these--the veterans that are in homeless shelters so, are they on--do they have jobs? Are they on disability? Like what type of income would they have?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: All of the above. Many have part-times jobs or seasonal jobs. About 60% of the veterans are VHAL-VHA eligible. It means they're eligible for VA disability. So, like SII or SSDI, they would get some-some level of support from VA, which would be part of their income, and then a lot of the veterans who make under 200% of the poverty level would be public assistance.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, do we have-can we identify of how many are-how many-how many veterans have jobs? How many are on disability and do we have like price tag on the rent subsidy for like each veteran, each veteran that is homeless or do we do it as if something comes up?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: I'm-I'm sorry. I don't fully understand what you're asking.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, from the 500 plus veterans, right so in order to put a veteran in permanent housing, we need to know when you approach a-a landlord-

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Uh-hm.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --to find housing
3 for a veteran. So, the first thing they're going to
4 ask is how much rent am I getting?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Uh-hm.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, if we don't
7 have a price tag on the subsidy for each one, then
8 it's more--it's more difficult, it makes it more
9 difficult to find an apartment because if you're
10 going to tell someone the reimbursement is \$800 a
11 month, and the market rate is \$2,000 a month, you're
12 not going to find any housing for that veteran,
13 right? So, if we have a price tag and we know we
14 have a breakdown of what veterans are in homeless
15 shelters and how much subsidy he or she will be
16 getting from the federal or from the city, then we
17 have a better--better idea and better picture of how
18 to move on to reach out to those who may have
19 permanent housing and to say this is what the subsidy
20 is and this is what you're going to be getting and
21 this way we could better place these veterans into
22 permanent housing.

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA:
24 Absolutely. So I can send you the--the rental subsidy
25 amount for each of those six voucher types, and then

2 within each of them the tenants pay up to a third of
3 their income in rent. So that would give an
4 indication of what the dollar amount is.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, okay.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very
8 much. You know, last week someone Tweeted at me and
9 I—and the Tweet said basically, I don't remember
10 exactly what it said. It said a homeless—a homeless
11 veteran on the I think it was one of the trains. I'm
12 sorry, the R-Train, the R-Line it said, and so I
13 Tweeted back and I usually don't Tweet back. I—I
14 answer my Facebook messages, my emails, text
15 messages. I—I just don't Tweet back. For all those
16 people who have Tweeted me, I don't Tweet back, but I
17 did to this one, and I Tweeted back saying: So, why
18 don't you call 311? So, the response to why don't
19 you call 311, he said—he—he Tweeted actually a
20 homeless veteran on the R-Line. So, I said why don't
21 you call 311. There are many services. So, he
22 responded, oh, but, you know, I didn't really know
23 that it's a veteran. So, why does it make a
24 difference? You could still call 311. It doesn't
25 make a difference if it's a veteran or not. But

based on the conversation that I had was that there are veterans who are out there panhandling. So, if there are—and there is resources, right. So veterans have resources. Even if they don't have a job, there are resources for veterans. So, what would make a veteran go out and panhandle if they have the resources number one, and number two is that—does the outreach team go out there to the transit systems to identify those veterans? And if you see a veteran panhandling and to find out why that person he or she may need an extra couple of dollars and going out there?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah, I—I would say that, you know, every veteran who becomes homeless, indeed every individual who becomes homes has a different story, but in general I found it useful because I'll sit down next to any veteran I see on the street or in public transit and talk to them about their situation, and I always offer them 311 as well as my card to contact our team directly. But there are what I would call the enduringly homeless. So, these are individuals who have significant levels of disability including mental illness, substance misuse, and those are the individuals who will

benefit most from supportive housing and Nichole and her team are working with the city agencies to make sure that our veterans who really need supportive housing get placed in those units. Then I would say, and we will—we will lay a—we'll—we'll graph out and put together a comprehensive presentation for you with all of the specific numbers, but I find it useful to at least understand the categories. So, enduringly homeless those really are meant to—they—they do very well within supportive housing. The economic model has proven itself with the wraparound services and these folks can live lives with purpose, passion and meaning within those environments.

Secondly, there's a group that I would call economically homeless. That is to say they're working full-time, but they simply cannot make the rents here in New York City, and so for those individuals really what we want to do is we want to intervene with them yes to help them out with a voucher that they may qualify for, but also help them with training and educations that we can get them, you know, help them advance into a job that will more—more completely pay the rent and get their family into a more stable situation. The third

category that I run into are what I would call the episodically homeless. Now, this may be the individual who has recently suffered a heart attack or a divorce or lost a job. Something, you know, very abrupt in their lives and the sooner we can intervene with that individual before they start going down that path of decline the better off we all are. Now, I will say that some veterans that I meet on the street are not actually veterans and it's very apparent once I've started to them and—and, you know, as soldiers do is we can—we can tell very quickly whether or not someone is a veteran, and when that's the case, I let them know, listen I—I care about all of it, all homeless individuals in New York City, and I still let them let know about the 24/7 Homeless Outreach team that DHS runs, and that's for all of us as citizens in New York if you see anyone who's out on the street. Sometimes they'll get a little angry with you if you ask them if they've called 311, but we can call 311 and let them know who we've seen, and they, you know, they have trained folks who can engage with those individuals. Of the 30 or so homeless veterans that we have that are still on the street, we know them by name. Most of them do have

severe mental illnesses and what we do is we work very hard to keep that relationship intact. There are members of our team who will go out when we've had a veteran who's been reported to us, but in the main for 24/7 coverage we rely absolutely on the 24/7 team that DHS has set up, which is accessible through 311. So, there's any number of reasons. You know, some veterans particularly those who in recent wars have been exposed to blasts concussive events, and are suffering from brain injuries as well the-the sequelae of now 16, 17 years our nations' longest war. They just simply have not been able to get the care that they have earned, and for some of those we know and, in fact, Eric, our General Counsel we know that there's a report that came out last year that 13,000 individuals since 2001 have been-received bad paper, dischargers for conditions that include concussive traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance misuse, a number of conditions that if we can intervene with them, get them linked up to quality legal services, those discharge upgrades statuses can be challenged, and the Department of Defense has absolutely, in fact, the President as recently as January of this year

signed an executive order to improve mental health resources for veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life. So, there—it's a complicated web, but we can absolutely set up the graphic and by, you know, by veteran status and dollar amount and all of the things that we have done here in New York City that have accounted for us having reduced veteran homelessness almost twice as much as other cities across the country, and I would say that those three innovations, which the city is now in the process of adopting more broadly, the Veteran peer-to-peer teams, the coordination teams, veterans aren't the only folks who benefit from peer-to-peer relationships. Secondly, our Landlord Hotline that kind of sort of concierge white glove service where landlords can contract us directly and know that we'll get all of the information about their—their available apartment and then we'll help to not just put a veteran there, but find the right fit, and then provide the after care, which means a lot to the landlords. We also know that it was very important three years ago when the Mayor announced that we were going to successfully end chronic veteran homelessness in 2015, which as you noted we've very

proud of that fact. It was a team effort that include Council support as well as our community and federal, state and local government partners. The Mayor took a look at this challenge and said okay, we get, you know, we get these voucher programs from HUD and from the VA and from Section 8, and those covered this proportion of the veteran population, but what about the others who don't have programs for which they're eligible? And that then led to the three programs that Nicole mentioned that by taking this population health approach that has been another way that New York City has been able to achieve an outsized impact even here in New York City as you well know, less than 1% vacancy rate for affordable housing. So, it's not like we're operating in a--an--in an elastic market. In fact, when Michelle Obama invited five or six cities in October of 2016 to the White House to share wisdom from what we've learned across the country in this campaign, one of the other cities was briefing their results and said, you know, we really struggle man because we've got, you know, we've only got a 15% vacancy rate in our affordable housing, and we just sort of sat on our hands and said, we'd kill for having a 15% affordable

housing vacancy rate. So, that's another piece of this, but then thirdly we've also—

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]

Right, so I think-- Commissioner I think you're doing a phenomenal job, and we came a long way since 2017.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We have.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We have. So, I just want to go to my colleagues. I have one more question before I go to my colleagues. When someone does call 311, and it's a veteran, right, how-how long does it take for the outreach to go out to identify that the person maybe—the person is a veteran or not? Like how does it work? You go out there or—or is it Breaking Ground that goes out that does—that identifies the 311 call? How does it work?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay, so someone—

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] If you could just give me like a brief answer because I want to get to my colleagues who have other—who have other hearings.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. So, worked with 311 over the last couple of years to better connect, identify and connect veterans who call. If

they're in crisis, they'll get connected to the National Veteran Crisis line, press 1. If they are looking for mental health services, they are connected to NYC Well, and NYC Well has, you know, an entire range of services. They talk with the veteran and determine what they--they're eligible for, what they're interested in. About half of our veterans here in New York City get their mental health services from the VA. The other half a variety of public sector and private sources. So, it depends upon the veteran, but yes veterans who call 311 or NYC Well, are then guided by the--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So, how what--how long does it take to identify if someone's a veteran?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Their commitment is to go--is to identify and locate every person who's called into 311 within the hour, and you're right about Breaking Ground. There's one contract per borough and Breaking Ground has Brooklyn, and then the BRC, Bowery Residents Committee has the--the MTA contract so--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So Breaking Ground goes out and identifies someone let's

say that on the train, right and gets the name and how does Breaking Ground identify are you a veteran? Is the question asked to—to the person are you a veteran and if the person answers yes I am, how does Breaking Ground identify that that person is a veteran to give that information over to you?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: The self report goes into what's known as the Home Tracker at DHS, which we all have access to that work with homeless veterans across the city, and then the VA does a check to verify.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But how long—how long is the process from the 311 call goes in until it gets to you? Is it days, weeks, hours, minutes?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BRANCA: It—it varies by the veteran.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, okay. So, I'd like to talk more about that. So, finally I'm going to go to my colleagues for the third time. I just want to mention that the first—today is the—the budget hearing. So, our first hearing that's going to be non-budget related will be at one of the homeless shelters, and it was interesting when I called the administration to have the first hearing

at the homeless shelter they said I'm sorry but we cannot disclose any shelters, and when I Googled it, I found it online so then they agreed. So, the first hearing will be at a homeless shelter to-at-on site, and-and also I'd like to do maybe like a ride on the transit system. I know one of my colleagues Justin Brannan takes a train everyday.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Great.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I'd like to go on and meet some of the homeless individuals on the train to see how many are veterans or not, and to go out there first hand because it's very nice when you sit at the hearing and you visualize what's going on at a homeless shelter or on the streets, but without actually being out there, we certainly won't know exactly how people feel and how people are out on the street. Our veterans need to be taken care of, and we live in a great country. So, I'd like my [background comments] Yeah, I'd like to recognize my colleague from Brooklyn Council Member Alan Maisel, and so I'd like Paul Vallone.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Congratulations to our Chair Chaim Deutsch. Welcome on board to the Veterans and I guess I'm a veteran of veterans. So,

I'm happy about that. Commissioner, General, Doctor, I'm happy to see you again, and the advocates that are in the room. I-I had a bunch of things I wanted to ask, but we will have many times together. I had promised the Queens Delegation who is doing their budget today, and presenting like any minute. So, I have to go, but the coordination with city agencies, that was something that I always fought for in the first four years. How has it been for you, and we've even designated that an employee at every city agency be designated to work with our Veterans Agency. How has that been going?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It's working very well. Four years ago we just provided one annual training for the city agency liaisons. Today we've got an annual face-to-face training as well as quarterly calls as well as daily contact with our outreach specialist and our intake specialists who are working with veterans and their families, and who need specific information with a given agency. So, it's working very well.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Are there any agencies this point that don't have a liaison?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, I'll have to double check. At any given time with turnover there's typically two or three, but I don't have that information right in front of me, but I'll be glad to get it to the committee.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, that would--that would be great I think coordinating with them. So many of our topics cross-reference other agencies.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, I think that would be critical. With the Veterans Advisory Board, how has the cooperation and collaboration been going there.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Outstanding. You know for the--three years ago when we refreshed and renewed, the Veterans Advisory Board membership, you'll recall when I came on board, every member's term was expired. A couple by over ten years. So, it was time to refresh and renew. As we approached the election last year the Veterans Advisory Board realized that we would have new speaker, and possibly a new mayor, but in any event felt that it would be more prudent to wait until after the election to act

upon the current terms that are expiring. So, we've got I think two that haven't year expired, but they're all within a period of, you know the six to eight months, and we're now working actively. We've gotten some great candidate referrals from some of the veteran advocate agencies--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
Which is always--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --as well as the VAB members.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --that's-that's always good to hear.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, it's--we're really very excited about the opportunity to work with the chair, work with the new speaker and to refresh and renew this Veterans Advisory Board, which will be able to advise us and take us to the next level given where we are today.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And on the outreach topic the Community Outreach Coordinators, I really haven't seen--seen one. So, we need to step that up. I don't even know who the Queens Coordinator is, but I'd like to have that aspect grown because especially in Queens we're the highest

percentage of veterans, I think that would be very important to bring the message of the board out to the counties, and I think if we as the Council Members don't know who they are, it's not work.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I'm the only Veteran Committee member in Queens, and I don't know who it is. So, whoever that person is needs to obviously get involved with some of our veteran groups out in Queens so we can have that dialogue so we--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
Absolutely. I couldn't agree more, and we're putting together our 2018 Outreach Plan, which includes not only making office call visits with elected officials such as yourself, but also meeting with the community boards, the borough presidents, other individuals and agencies within each borough. So, you'll definitely be receiving a visit, and hopefully--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Alright.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --establishing an ongoing relationship overtime, but that's been a very important part of our development as a new agency to have that borough-to-borough outreach.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And my last question will be on veterans affordable housing. So, as the administration pushes for more affordable housing throughout the city, I'm always pushing to have a percentage set aside for veterans, but that's not happening too often. So, I'd like to get your view and maybe support on trying to get a mandatory set-aside for veteran affordable housing. I think a specific project near Willets Point is coming. It's not mentioned, and every time I bring up veterans, everyone going. No, we have a plan for it, but it doesn't include veterans. I think we need to change that dialogue, and make sure we include our veterans.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We're always for, you know, considering any initiative or proposal that would improve the lives of our veterans and their families. We would love to work with you going forward on any such affordable housing initiatives.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you—thank you Council Member, and I just want to mention in regards to what you just said, Council Member Vallone. So, I did go to a—I chaired the Planning and Dispositions

hearing for the last few months because Council Member Ben Kallos was on paternity leave. So there was certain HPD develop--developments that we approved in the Council, which set aside about 10% for veterans.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, my question to them was how come if we mention homeless, you know, apartment set-aside for homeless, why can't we have like 5 of 10% set-aside for veterans? So, the answer was because of the Fair Housing Act. So, if the Fair Housing--if there's a Fair Housing Act, how can you mention homeless without mentioning veterans? I mean there's no real difference if you have a homeless veteran. So, I did put in a bill to have a disparity study, and for them to come back to me and if everything works out well, then in the future plans when we do rezonings, when we have different projects that go through the ULURP, then we should be able to set aside and mention specifically for veterans. So, I'm looking forward to the response from--from the Council and from HPD as far as their Fair Housing

Act. So, that's a very good point that Council Member Vallone put out.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Anyone else? Justin.

COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair. Congratulations. I wanted to ask a little bit about the--the Veterans Initiatives contracting. If these initiatives are funded again in FY19, I know right now a lot of these contracts are managed by other agencies whether it's DYCD or DOH or, you know, HRA is there--or is DVS interested or--or is there a plan to manage these in-house?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, at--at the current time there's no plan to move forward with that particular--establishing that particular capability because right now where we are in our evolution is we are establishing our internal administrative capability to take over the back office functions that DCAS has been providing for us over the last 20 months. We're about 20 months into our agency existence. So, those--those capabilities include basic HR onboarding, time keeping and that

sort of function, budget analysts and internal procurement in contracting as well as legal services. So, as we continue to grow and develop, we're happy to then entertain the, you know, the analysis of what it would take to establish a formal external ACCO contracting capability, but it's simply premature for where we are right now. I—I will say this, Council Member Brannan, is that we do plan to establish an ombudsman sort of role, which we think will be happy. As—as we've gotten feedback from veteran advocates of those who have worked within the contracting process over the last several years, it's become clear that what would be very helpful would be for a DVS ombudsman to be able to work both with the City Council to able to track sums of discretionary funding that had come forward to various groups in the community, and then for that ombudsman to work with the community as well as the city agency to make sure that the communication is clear, that the veteran voice and experience is honored and that things go forward as efficiently as they possibly can. So, that's something that you will be seeing from us establishing this year prior to considering any advance towards a formal ACCO capability. My-my

hunch is that the ombudsman function is going to really satisfy the vast majority of concerns that had come to our attention over these last four years. The other piece of it is knowing that the city has reformed substantially its contracting capabilities, and I know that you're in the middle of working with that as well. So, it's-it's-I would just say that it's-it's evolution in process in terms of bringing on first our programmatic capabilities. Now, we're working to stand up our administrative capabilities and will then probably a year from now be ready to look over the horizon again to see what makes sense going forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: It makes sense. One more. Another thing that I saw was the Vet Connect NYC. What's the status there, and-and do we have an idea when that can be completed, or when that will be completed?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, absolutely. So, we or Eric actually has been our point person working with DCAS and MOCS as wellly Syracuse University on this. It looks like we should be on track formal launch, which-which would be a rebranding. It's important for people to understand

that the city has procured, is in the process of procuring a coordinated system—a coordinated provider network that has been functioning since 2015. So, it's got 80 vetted service providers today across a host of areas. The city's lead agency for the pilot was Small Business Services. The VA has been a player from day one, which is huge. CUNY was the educational pillar, and so we're just at the very end of that procurement process now, and we anticipate a formal launch of the rebranded from NY Serves to Vet Connect NYC. Once we've procured it, we've rebranded it, then we're going to be able to work within the city to bring on more vital city services onto the coordinated system network as well as to identify what are the gaps within our service provision across the city that we might want to become more active in engaging other vetted service providers to come on board with as well. So, we're very excited about. This—this is a—this is really a—a pioneering concept that came out of the experience at the Robin Hood Network—the Robin Hood Foundation had several years ago. One night \$12 million was raised. The Robin Hood Foundation found that in working with veterans' organizations it was impossible to tell who was

quality, who wasn't, who did what, who was going to be around next month. They found that their best investments were in-in enduring infra-infrastructure like the city with the Workforce 1 cities-centers like the VA, and-and-and so they set up this pilot program that started in 2015 and it's housed, it's overseen by the Institute for Veteran and Military Families out of Syracuse University. It's housed on an advanced tech platform run by Unite Us, a veteran owned company, and then the secret sauce to this model is provided through the Coordination Team and that Coordination Team, that contract has been won by Northwell Health. All roads to the Coordination Team. They then sort out with the veteran, with a family member, they customize a roadmap forward. They do all of the back office referral work so that the veteran gets the service referral. All of the back office work has been done, and then we capture the data. So, in real time we can determine what the needs are, what the trends are, what the gaps are. So, you're going to hear more about this, but yes, we're really looking forward to its rebranding and formal launch this spring.

COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: This spring is the answer?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Okay, cool. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, the—the budget for DVS is \$4.6 million. Do believe that's sufficient or do you feel that it needs to be increased, and if yes in what ways?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Mr. Chair, you're talking to a Commissioner whose budget starting out four years ago was about 10% of the current budget. My experience in this position is that I have always gotten the resources that I've needed to lead this mission, and to build this agency and I—I'm fully confident that that will continue to be the case.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, thank you. So, I just want to reiterate to talking about veteran homelessness. So, over the next year after this fiscal budget I want to focus strictly on reducing and eliminating the veteran homeless population. So, I'm looking forward to continuing working closely with your office, and you have been very forthcoming,

and we had many meetings over the last two plus months, and I appreciate your partnership and the late night calls. I know we spoke at times at 11:00 p.m. during-at night during the week, and I appreciate your-your partnership, and willingness to-to do everything possible and to running this DVS and doing such a great job with all your-with all your people. So, you have currently 36 and you're looking-the headcount is 41. So, what is from 36 to 41, right? So you have another four vacancies.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, what-what are you looking to hire to those four spots?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, so our four vacancies right now we've got a Veteran Peer Coordinator Manager who has already been identified. She's a veteran who's moved across the country to join our team, and I think she's coming on board in the next two to three weeks. So, she's in the very final stages of coming on board. We also have a staff attorney position that has not yet been posted so, we're-we just receive word on that quite recently but we'll be putting that opening out. We also have [background comments] two Outreach Coordinators for

vacancies that are currently empty and then we've also got [background comments] our CRM Administrator. You heard from my testimony that we've just recently implemented CRM. We've got a manager that will be coming on board within the next probably six to eight weeks.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you mentioned two Outreach Coordinators. Which borough are they lacking?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, we've got the two out—we've got an opening in Queens. We recently had our Outreach Coordinator there who accepted her dream position at Department of Education. We're very proud of here, but we also have the Northern Manhattan, the Harlem position that is open as well. Borough President Gale Brewer has been kind enough to allow us to put a satellite office in her Harlem Office.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But don't you usually have—currently, don't have five Outreach Coordinators--Outreach Coordinators?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We-we have five Outreach Coordinators and a manager, but we have two vacancies right now.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So—so those two vacancies are part of this from 36 to 41?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That is correct.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, okay. So, in other words you had 38 jobs filled up until--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I mean it's—it sort of goes up and down, but we've—we've—we've been steadily increasing our capacity. We've recently had the one, you know, was we've had, you know, a vacancy, we've been filling other office needs. For example, Melissa Walters that we just mentioned, so, you know, it's—it's a—it's a give and take within 2 to 3% on any given day, but yes have two at—currently, we have two outreach specialists positions that are vacant and that we are working to fill. We have one person who's already been identified but we have not--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No, I'm not—just on the census. So, now you have 36 positions filled, right?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, in those 36 positions you have five outreach coordinators, right? So, you have one for each borough?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We have one for each borough and a manager.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: One each. So-so that's part of the 36. So, if two are leaving, that would go down to 34.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, no, no. We have 36 people on board, but we have two positions that are currently vacant. We're doing some outreach.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, so 36 currently with two positions. Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] 36 people onboard. We have two outreach specialist positions that are vacant.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, got it. Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, when we bring them onboard it will then be up to 38.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 38, and-and-okay, so the 41 when do you believe it's going to be filled with the staff attorney, and-and what is the staff attorney's position? What-what do you expect the staff attorney to do?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Current, Eric is our General Counsel and he is very much looking forward to bringing on some assistance. Eric--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yeah, do you have a staff? Do you have an attorney now on staff?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, Eric is our General Counsel.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, that's right. So, you're looking--so you're looking for one

ERIC HENRY: [interposing] Correct.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

ERIC HENRY: An additional staff attorney to come on board to handle a multitude of different areas, some which include employment, general compliance, EDO. As--as much employment law and labor relations coverages we can amass, that would be excellent. So, we're looking for those particular coverage areas.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Eric has always been active in terms of advocacy. You know, this last year adding veterans it's a protected status to the Human Rights Commission. Eric was our point person working the Human Rights Commission, the

Public advocate and he advocacy groups on that.

There are a number of things that we lean on Eric to do and so the staff attorney position was a realization that we needed extra help to provide some depth.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so whose—I mean you have—so you’re General Council. You’re their staff attorney now. So, what—what made you feel that you needed another staff attorney and--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] So, so, let me explain--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --opposed to having someone else, you know, reaching out to those veterans one-on-one and I mean for that?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Well, Eric—Eric is dual headed as our Director of Intergovernmental Affairs as well as our General Counsel--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --and so, were just—we are at the point of our—our organizational development now where we realize that the legal issues whether it be compliance, whether it be employment law, whether it be advocacy at the state,

federal or local level there are just a host of legal issues in addition to the IGA issues that need attention. So, that's what we're counting on Eric and the staff attorney who will be coming on board to assist with. Another example, Eric has been our point person working our Whole Health Team, with the Rikers Team to stand up this new agency or this new unit that's for veterans only. Very exciting stuff, but it requires time, and attention from Eric to be our interface with the legal service agencies as well as the Criminal Justice System.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so do we have a mechanism of identify-identifying the number of children in New York City schools with parents who are veterans or those who are on active duty service members or a part of the National Guard? If so, how because I know that I-I was supposed to have a meeting today with DOE, and the Mayor's Office regarding putting-having an application the student application in public schools to identify if a child is a son of a veteran or a child s the son of-a child of a-of-of someone who in active military, currently an active military member. So, it's very-I don't

think we have any numbers, right of how many children in our school system.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I don't have any data on that, Mr. Chair. I know that the—the meeting that you referenced to—to school, it will be rescheduled here in the nest few days, and I'm not aware at this point of any measures that DOE has in place to identify children of military or veteran service members, but I will certainly look forward to working you on this. I would say that as a part of our Veterans on Campus Initiative last fall, we engaged with an organization name the Military Child Education Coalition headquartered in Harker Heights, Texas. They have done this work for the military for the last 20 years, and they are currently working with us to determine how we can best coordinate with our post-9/11 veterans and veterans of any age who have school age children, who are coming to New York so we can help coordinate. So, this will be a real—I think it's an important area that we—we have not yet developed, and I look forward to working with the DOE and you and the Administration to address this.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. What services are available for children of veterans?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, there are a number of community service providers that provide services for children. What I need to do, Mr. Chair, is I would need to go back to our current coordinated service network as well as our NYC Well, and put together a list. I don't have that with me right now, but I'd be glad to prepare that with and for you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, but there are many services right?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Pardon me.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: There are many services?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, there--there are--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Even one, right. (sic)

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There--there definitely are services and the--the challenge becomes connecting folks with services, and the first step is yes identification.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, just out of curiosity is that we don't have--we don't the number

of children who are children of veterans, and there are many services for these children, right so--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] I want—I want to be careful here, Mr. Chair, because the—the VA does not provide direct services for children. They do work with families to a limited extent, but the—the vast majority of services that are provided to and available for children would be for military, National Guard and Reservist families. So, I really want to dig into this issue of what's going on with veterans' children because we don't have—we don't have visibility of this at this point other than to know that for example with our GI Bill users, the spouse can use that benefit, but in terms of specific benefits for children, I think we need to dig into that and get more granularity.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, who takes—so who would do the outreach if it's a child in—in the school that the parents is in the National Guard or an active member--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes, it's--

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --in service. So,
3 who would do the—who—who would do the outreach in the
4 schools?

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So—so, you know,
6 I'd have to check with our Outreach Specialist to see
7 if they—if they've had many such instances. I'm not
8 aware of many instances, but--

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] But
10 there are services if a child of a parent who is the
11 National Guard?

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: They—but they may
13 not be veteran specific services.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, so let's say
15 it's not veteran specific but there are services.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
17 Absolutely. I would say the First Lady's ThriveNYC
18 program has a, you know, social/emotional learning
19 services, all kinds of things.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]
21 Because I'm—I'm just wondering—I'm just wondering
22 that I'm not, you know, blaming it on you--

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, no.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --but I'm—I'm just
25 wondering that there are so many services. There

aren't many services available to children of-of
parents who are in the military, right?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And we don't know.
We, you know, we're in the city. We don't know how
many children are in the school system--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --and how much--how
much--how much resources that we're not giving them
because we did not reach out to them, and which is
kind of a shame because, you know, a lot of times you
have--we fight in the budget, we fight for money, we
fight for housing, we fight for so many different
things, and here we have--we have the resources. The
federal government is there when it comes to the
veterans and--and for families who have parents who--
who are in the active military, and the resources are
there, but we as the city we're not doing that
outreach of identifying those children who maybe now
you'll have a child of--of a parent who's in--who's in
active military now, who's taking out a scholarship
out a student loan, and maybe repaying it now because
they didn't know that the services are available.
So, not only do we need to go back and to let those

students know that there are resources, but I think it's our responsibility to find out and to let them know that if they—if they are repaying now a student loan, right, we need to find a way to get them the reimbursement for that because I think we failed when it comes to the children. If, you know, it's—it's kind of a shame because, you know, when we have an issue with the budget, we fight, we fight, we fight. But when the resources are there, us as leaders in the city are neglecting when it comes to going after the funding that is currently existing because we take it for granted saying the funding is there. They'll find a way, and that's why Vet Connect is important.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, we know.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But we still need to reach out to those students, and who are paying who—who took out those—those loans and are repaying those loans, and those loans could have been, you know, for free. I mean they could have gotten those—that scholarship because of their status. So, this is something very important. Do you have—do you want to comment on that?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure, yeah, I would just say, Chair Deutsch, I share your concern and this is a concern that's not just here shared between you and me at the city level, but Chairman of the--or rather Secretary of VA Shulkin has recently stood up a Federal Advisory Committee on family members, children, caregivers and survivors. I've been appointed to that committee and so, what we learn and what we identify that we need here in New York City I'll be able to carry those concerns to the broader level for federal policy change as well. But it starts, as you said, with identifying who our veteran and military children are.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Isn't the federal money there for that? I mean if you have 220,000 veterans in the city, right, and we could have quite a few thousands and thousands and thousands of children who--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] And once we, you know, the first step is identifying.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] But the funding--the funding should be there, the federal funding.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Really look forward to working with you on this issue. It's one that we just started to even conceptualize. So, your advocacy is well--well received on our end.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, and I think it's important when you're looking to hire to have someone, a coordinator who should look into those children who already took out loans. You know, it's a jackpot if they could get reimbursed for that.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And there could be families that are struggling, and so that's--I think that's very important if we could do something like that.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, finally, I know we have a lot of people on the panel who want to testify. So, I just want to say that there's several initiatives that I have already and work--working in the City Council like as you just mentioned, working with DOE to have a space for students on the application process to--to self-identify as children of veterans or active service members.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And I just want to publicly thank the veterans' advocates that are out there. I have met with many, if not all, and any time you reach out, you send me an email or you reach out to my office, you will—you will get a meeting, and this is so important. No one gets denied, and we—I try setting up the meeting as quick as possible, and I'm sure you could all vouch for that, and I want to thank you for your input and information you have given me over the last three months to helping me better understand what the—what the veterans are facing each and every day, and there's a lot of things we didn't really touch—touch upon. For example, mental health. This is something I'm looking to continue to work on what resources are available to work with the Commissioner to make sure that every veteran has the resources that they need. And I also want to thank my colleague for having the bull in the City Council just last week on the Veterans call War Property Tax Exemptions.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I'd like to thank my colleague Council Member Joe Borelli, and Council Member Eric Ulrich for that, and finally I want to

thank you, Commissioner. I had a lot of other questions for you, and I have like ten pages here, but your testimony had about 20 pages and you answer-- you answered many of the questions when it came to--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Good.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --what your agency does, and you've come really a long way since--since just--since 2017, and I want to thank you for your service as a veteran, and for what you continue to do for--on behalf of our veteran population, and really this is a really great partnership, and I want to thank you for being, like I said before, forthcoming and working and being very accessible to any questions that we have, and I really want to thank your staff. Your staff is also amazing--amazing. So, unless you have any further questions, I don't have any colleagues here. So, maybe my counsel has any questions. I'm kidding.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [laughs]

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But anyway, thank you, Commissioner. If you want to say something before you leave.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Mr. Chair, thank you so much. We're both blessed to

stand on the shoulders of giants. Those who have come before us were also blessed, but truly as I've long said, New York City we've got the best veteran advocates in the world, and so, really working together with our respective staffs, our teams of teams, our advocates, our city agencies, our community partners, and our ability to reach up to state and to federal government, there's no stopping us. We've come a long way, Mr. Chair, but we've got a long ways to go, and I look forward to the journey together. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Thank you very much. [gavel] [pause] [background comments, pause] Okay, for the first panel I'd like to call up Joe Hunt, Corey Ortega, Eddie McDonough, and Lisa Carling. [pause] I just want to mention that we have others testifying. So, we're going to try to keep it like at three minutes. Is that okay? I don't want to like, you know—I'm going to give you less time than your—that your speeches. So, is three minutes okay? Corey, I know you like to talk. Yeah. Okay. [pause] Okay, so Joe you're the first.

[pause]

JOE HUNT: Committee Members in absentia fore the opportunity to provide testimony regarding mental health services to New York City area veterans. My name is Joe Hunt. I'm a U.S. Army veteran, and I serve as the Director of the Veterans Mental Health Coalition of New York City, which is administered by the Mental Health Association in New York City. For more than 50 years the Mental Health Association has provide direct services, public education and advocacy to address the needs of New Yorkers living with behavioral health needs. In addition to overseeing the Veterans Mental Health Coalition, the MHA provides training and technical assistance as well as back-up call centers for vet- for the Veterans Crisis Line, which connects veterans to their families and caregivers with qualified Department of Veterans Affairs counselors who respond effective to crisis and some other emotional concerns. The MHA and the VHM, the Veterans Mental Health Coalition supported the creation of the New York City Department of Veterans Services to meet the needs of New York City's more than 220,000 veterans and applaud the department's approach to addressing the mental health and emotional wellbeing of veterans

through its Core4 Mental Health Model. This innovative model provides an integrated approach to mental health through its attention to the needs of veterans with clinically significant and behavioral health conditions as well as supporting their resilience by helping veterans become connected to psychosocial supports as peer mentors, social-and social engagement opportunities. This integrated approach is in keeping with current best practices and behavioral health, and has demonstrated the most positive outcomes occur when supports are able to consider multiple domains of functioning including social, emotional and mental health. Our mission, the mental health, the Veterans Mental Health Coalition is to improve access to and the quality of services to veterans, service members, their families and caregivers. Our membership is a diverse group of over 850 that represent—individuals representing more than 370 organizations. Nearly 80% of our members are non-mental health providers from housing, employment, legal services, academic institutions as well as city, state and federal agencies. They seek information and training about the culture and the needs of veterans in order to become more effective

in delivering their services. We believe the importance of non-mental health providers' role in veterans' access to mental health treatment and the information and training that the Veterans' Mental Health Coalition provides to our members have been largely overlooked. Reports from the Rand Corporation and recent studies by NY Serves, soon to be called Vet Connect, support our contention. The Rand Corporation study indicated that among New York State service members returning to civilian life 22% of returning veterans have a problem with diagnosis of PTSD or major depression. [bell] Thirty-four percent of members self-indicated a mental health need for therapy or substance abuse treatment overall. However, only one-third of these people sought treatment. The recent briefing by the Institute of Veterans and Military families, which currently oversees NY Serves indicated that veterans contacted this network requesting an average of four types of services including housing, employment, legal service and benefits, but only less than 2% of callers asked for healthcare services, and mental health services are a subsegment of that less than 2%. Based on the reports [coughs] it's reasonable to

extrapolate that approximately 67 out of every 100 veterans with a mental health need are seeing non-mental health providers. These non-clinical providers require the knowledge and knowledge and skills necessary to effectively identify and address the mental health needs of veterans and their families. At a minimum non-mental health providers need a basic understanding of military culture, the awareness to identify signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, and take weeks to engage at-risk veterans to ensure that they are connected to culturally and clinically competent sources of care. In 2000–Fiscal Year 2019, we plan to launch a [coughs] competency program, which will incorporate military cultural competency, mental health first aid, strength based engagement and suicide prevention. To encourage non-mental health providers to complete this training the MHA will offer a certificate of completion acknowledging provider's successful completion of the training, and providing them—providing program graduates with the credential that we will—that will enhance their professional status among current and future employers. I—I think that was my bell that went off. So, I'll end it

there. Our—our emphasis really is on making sure that more veterans and military members and their families and caregivers have access to and improve quality of mental health services.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Joe. We also have your written testimony here. So--

JOE HUNT: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --we've got everything here. So, thank you, Joe. Thank you for coming down today and testifying and for putting—for putting this together. So, really appreciate it. Thank you so much and thanks—thanks for your partnership.

JOE HUNT: Thank you.

COREY ORTEGA: How you doing. Before I start, I just want to say our testimony for the New York City Veterans Alliance is a little short for this hearing. It's because we've been having great communications back and forth with DVS and addressing some of our questions internally, and have been very satisfied with the answers and, you know, a shout out to Eric and Alexis and the Commissioner for the foresight and so, explanation why the short testimony. That being said, let the clock begin.

Good afternoon and thank you, Chair Deutsch and the Committee and members that were here previously for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Corey Ortega. I'm the Director of Civic and Government Affairs for the New York City Veterans Alliance, a member drive grassroots policy advocacy and community building organization that advances veterans and families of civic leaders, and I'm presenting testimony on behalf of our members who are active stakeholders in our advocacy. The New York City Veterans Alliance was a key advocacy voice in the creation of the Department of Veterans Services, DVS, as an independent agency, and we have been the premier community voice advocating to grow DVS' budget to the current \$4.5 million allotted for FY19. Our membership strongly supports our continued work to set high expectations for the role of DVS and New York City and beyond and there is much to be optimistic about DVS as DVS continues to build a staff of impressive professionals, as I mentioned before, to continue its impact—impactful work like the tracking and coordination of care and permanent housing for homeless veterans, which we—was discussed previously, but there's much more work still to be

done. We make, therefore—we make, therefore, the following recommendations for DVS' FY19 Budget.

1. DVS must have an Agency Chief Contracting Officer, ACCO. As we have in previous testimony before the Veteran Committee we strongly urge the Council to allocate funding to DVS' budget from the dedicated ACCO with expertise in the city's contracting and procurement processes. The delays have taken place over the last couple of years and bringing Vet Connect under DVS management would likely have been mitigated with in-house contracting. So, I'm—I'm going to veer off a little bit. So, I do agree with—with the Commissioner. It's—it's a growing agency, and it's coming about. Our advocacy to support the Commissioner I would say yes to while you're building the structure, while you're building this foundation for DVS to include ACCO because there are a lot of developments, a lot of procurement policies and procedures that you have to have set in place. So, as the—as the agency grows over time and their budget, and the responsibilities to the 220,000 veterans, it's good to place it early on to build on that foundation, and have a strong foundation moving forward. So, those are more conversations that I'll—

that I'll have with the Commission and their staff, and but I just wanted to give a little background and explanation of that.

2. DVS should oversee discretionary funds for Veteran Services. We also again strongly advocate for the discretionary funds and awards, and by New York City Council Members to community organizations serving veterans and families to be managed by DVS, ACCO.

3. Veteran Employment Pay for Success Program should—should have a robust metric for success including independent oversight. The \$125,000 projected for FY19 Budget for the VA Orchestrated Veterans Employment Pay for Success Program proposes as social investment pilot. Yeah, a social impact investment pilot for New York City with payment by New York City for employment outcomes for veterans with PTSD. This is an interesting new model for serving veterans that we believe should be explored. We're supporting this, but we urge that this committee ensure the robust metrics. Some of the questions that we're having dialogues back and forth with DVS is how those metrics are formulated, how they're determined by this third-party entity Westat,

and we'll continue having the conversation, but, yeah, they say we'll continue having the conversation with DVS and learn more as we go along. Lastly, DVS should continue refining its reporting metrics for success. We're very, very pleased that their CRM system is online. You head a lot of the metrics when the Commissioner had previously testified, and those metrics are only going to get stronger, better and clearer, and gives all, both City Council and the advocates here at the table how to address the needs so that we have clear and concise metrics. With that, I end my testimony, and welcome any questions or ideas.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you Corey and, you know, I felt—I feel like I know you for like years. I see you all over the place, and I only know you for three months—two months. So, Corey, thank you and thank you for supporting our Commissioner and DVS. So, next to give testimony is Lisa.

LISA: Thank you so much, Chairman Deutsch. I'm honored to be here really, and my testimony will be really brief. I'm Lisa Carling, Director of TDF Accessibility Programs, and I'm here to advocate for the TDF Veterans Theater Going

Program, and if you remember nothing else, please remember the power of the performing arts. We live in New York City. We have the best theater available I think around the world, we have reached out to over 17 veterans groups in the five boroughs with a wide range of veterans from all different eras including veterans who are in homeless shelters and we-we give pairs of tickets to Broadway shows. So, it's an opportunity for a veteran to come with whomever with a child because you would ask what can you do for children of veterans, and I have here Eddie sitting next to who's the main event, the big voice, but please remember that theater is for everyone, and-and we want to share that, the power of the performing arts with our city's veterans. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Lisa.

EDDIE MCDONOUGH: Okay. Good afternoon.

Thank you so much for having me today, and I'd especially to thank Ms. Sutton for all the hard work she does for the veterans. Hello, my name is Edwin McDonough. I am a current resident in Surrounding (sic) Village Day Top Veterans Program, which treats for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and also substance abuse, and I'm happy and proud to be here today. I

wish to thank the City Council Veterans Committee and the Council Members for their support of the TDF Veterans Theater Going Program. Through this program, I had the opportunity in December to have seen Ms. Saigon with Surrounding Village Program, and it was the first time that I saw a Broadway play in quite some time. What made this experience great was helping me with social life and getting sober. I'm also developing theater as a new hobby. I believe theater gives veterans a chance to heal from past dealings and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, to make identification with their lives and with the story lines and to interact with the audience as well because when I was there I met many people from all walks of life, from different states, different countries, and it was very, very interesting. It is important to know that we're not alone, and feel, though—and we feel as though we are part of society. It is a healthy hobby, and an activity that is new to quite a lot of—to a lot of veterans. Overall, I believe it's a good positive experience. I took advantage of the free TDF membership so I can continue attending the theater at reduced costs, and we hope you will continue to support this program

because of the wonderful opportunity that it provides for city's veterans. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Joe, Corey, Lisa, Eddie. Thanks for coming down this afternoon. Yes.

COREY ORTEGA: So, a couple points that were made during your responses in the testimony. Number 1 in terms of self-selection to find out if a person is a veteran throughout different stages of the questions you asked her, you asked, I know during the Hope Count, which is the yearly count administered by DHS also in coordination with DVS, they—I believe—I—I was checking my—with my superiors. They did not have the question included in the 2018 unless someone can correct me, but they had it in previous years. So, maybe that's something that this committee could look at, having a discussion with DHS, you know, can be included in the 2019 Hope Count as basically I—I went out there with New York City Veterans Alliance, and we literally went to the train stations and the streets, and we encountered, you veterans that were homeless. We said, you know, you can call 311 and some opted out, and decided not to. So, just a quick tidbit on that.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, yeah.

COREY ORTEGA: Uh, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 2014. Thank you.

Alright, thank you for coming today once again. I'm going to call the next panel. Jonathan Weinstein, Jacqueline Sullivan, Kowaki-Towaki Kotawa. I don't know if I got your name right, but it's like written. [background comments] [pause] Alright, Jonathan. Thank you. [pause]

JONATHAN WEINSTEIN: Hi. On behalf of as someone who is devoted to helping veterans who are experiencing distress, self-destructive and suicidal behavior, I am keenly aware of the challenges we face in providing veterans the support they need. My perspective on these challenges is informed by the intensive training I received myself on Samaritan's 24-Hour Suicide Prevention Hotline, which was as comprehensive, thoughtful and effective as any of my studies to become a clinical psychologist, and my current role as the Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the VA Hudson Valley Healthcare Service. The most recent statistics by the CDC show that suicide, the tragic and ultimate symbol of untreated mental health continues to increase in this country causing

more deaths each year than automobile accidents as many fatalities as AIDS and homicides combined. But even more alarming is the rate of veteran suicide in New York, which is almost twice the nation average and three times that of the state. This tells us that no matter what we're doing, we have to do better and more. My personal experience with the VA mirrors much of what I've learned at Samaritans, which is it doesn't matter how many programs you offer, how much training people get, how much information is made available, if those you serve do not feel comfortable with what you offer, if they do not feel listened to, you're not going to get very far. Basically, you can't prescribe how someone else should access help. As an example of this the Veterans Crisis Hotline, the National Hotline, which is a valuable service designed to help veterans who may be experiencing crisis, but can and often does require the caller to disclose their name and location thereby raising the risk that police could be called to initiate a rescue, which dissuaded some veterans in need from even making the call in the first place. This is something Samaritans realized over 60 years ago when it developed the world's first suicide prevention

hotline, which is completely confidential, thereby providing those who are depressed and in crisis who are most impacted by stigma who are resistant to seeking help and who are concerned about losing their right to make their own decisions with an alternative to 911, a safe place that they can call in confidence 24 hours a day. Samaritans does this, which just reinforces the need for providing our current and retired veterans with multiple points of access a cross section of choices, and alternatives that they can choose from when seeking helping that fit their own individual needs, comfort, and values utilizing a broad spectrum as possible of different approaches and methodology from humanistic and faith based to clinical This concept of enhanced caring community was coined by Samaritans when it was working closely with epidemiologists at the University of Rochester Medical Center [bell] that were charged with evaluating the U.S. Air Force Suicide Prevention Plan, possibly the most comprehensive and successful so far in this country. The important lesson taken from the Air Force program was the need to impact the culture and its idea of helping from top to bottom to train everybody who came in contact with soldiers'

insensitivity awareness, communications and assessment and to engage every community partner in their environment to take an active role in providing care and support, and that is the suggestion we would make today: Expand New York City's Helping Network for vital alternatives to the standard programs and services that are available, engage those community partners that have been included in previous efforts. Strengthen New York City's safety net for veterans. Provide more options to and opportunities to get help and save lives. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very much. A question. Are you part of Vet Connect?

JONATHAN WEINSTEIN: No, I'm not. I'm part of the V.A. Hudson Valley. I'm the Suicide Prevention Coordinator. We handle the five counties north and New York City. We have a number of relationships with community providers. Samaritans is an important one for us. We include their phone number in all of our safety plans that veterans who have high risk for suicide complete. We also have relationships with different veterans organizations like Peer-to-Peer. So, I may be working with them,

but I—I may—I may know them by a different name than you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, because I—you do have services in the five boroughs, and I just met with—I just met with your—your organization, and I’m supporter, and I believe that it’s very important, suicide prevention.

JONATHAN WEINSTEIN: Right, and again I represent the VA. So, Mental—VHA Mental Health Clinics. So, we certainly work with community providers. We also provide direct care ourselves.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, thank you. Okay. So, Jacqueline.

JACQUELINE SULLIVAN: Good afternoon. My name is Jacqueline Sullivan. I’m a senior staff attorney with the Veterans Justice Project at Bronx Legal Services, a part of Legal Services NYC. Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the nation with offices in all five boroughs where we serve over 90,000 New Yorkers annually. The Veterans Justice Project represents low-income veterans, active duty service members and their families who are—who are in need of civil legal services in the areas of housing law, public benefit,

eligibility, family law and other essential needs. We run a citywide legal hotline for veterans and staff multiple legal clinics at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and other facilities throughout the city. We provide free legal services to well over a thousand of New York City's veterans, active duty service members and their families every year. We thank the City Council for inviting us to testify at this hearing for the Veterans Committee. We also want to thank the Veterans Committee for their past support of our Veterans Justice Project. Without the funding, we have received we would not have been able to provide legal services to such a large number of the city's veterans population. Low-income veterans facing civil legal problems often cannot afford to hire an attorney. Yet, they are at a severe disadvantage without one. The Veterans Justice Project works to ensure that veterans receive the benefit of counsel when tackling civil legal matters. The vast majority of the veterans we represent are in eviction proceedings. We provide lawyers to veterans at risk of becoming homeless because we believe that the best way to end veteran homelessness is prevent— is to prevent it happening in the first place. Here

is one story of the veteran I have represented in Housing Court who I will refer to as Mr. C. Mr. C is a veteran who had suffered a stroke and respiratory problems, and was then diagnosed with cancer of leg and amputation of his leg after the cancer spread. Mr. C had terrible conditions in his Bronx apartment including a severe mold infestation, which exacerbated his respiratory issues and may have contributed to his cancer according to his doctor. With the VJP's help, Mr. C went to court and secured an agreement by the landlord to cut his rent in half and to repair his apartment. However, the landlord failed to complete the repairs, and we were forced to return court. Facing further court action, the landlord finally did repair Mr. C's apartment by deep cleaning behind the premises walls to treat the mold. With our advocacy, Mr. C was also awarded a Special Exit and Prevention Supplement or SEPS voucher to assist him in paying his ongoing rent. Mr. C can now focus on his health without worrying about the conditions in his apartment. Our veterans should not have to face a risk—a rationing of civil legal services. They have sacrificed for all of us. We have a duty to ensure that veterans receive the

benefits to which they are entitled including proper medical care, access to safe affordable housing, a good education as well as access to justice. I am proud to represent veterans and I urge the City Council to continue supporting civil legal services for veterans. Thank you again for giving us this opportunity to testify. Legal Services NYC looks forward to working with you and the administration to ensure that New York City is able to best support our veterans in need. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Jacqueline. So, I have the same question. Is—are you part of Vet Connect?

JACQUELINE SULLIVAN: I don't think we are, no.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I—one thing I just don't understand is that if you—if there are those organizations who help our veterans so why aren't you part of Vet Connect?

JACQUELINE SULLIVAN: I—I'm not really sure if—if we are or not to be honest with you. It's something that I'd have to check with—with our major products—our—our project directors. It—it might be

something that we are a part of, but I'm just—that I know as a different name.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Alright.

Okay, if you could just look into it. Maybe you are. I don't know, but we'll check it out, but you should definitely make sure because if you're providing services to our veterans then we should be part of it. Okay.

JACQUELINE SULLIVAN: Absolutely.

Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

JACQUELINE SULLIVAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very much. Towaki. Did I—did I say your name right?

Yes, it's fine.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No, no is it—I don't want it to be fine. People call me all kinds of names.

TOWAKI KOTAWA: People mess it up all the time.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, is it Towaki?

TOWAKI KOTAWA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Okay, thank you.

TOWAKI KOTAWA: So, to be—we met on November 27th outside of City Hall. There was a public meeting just like this one where I was illegally excluded from that public meeting. It was actually in the Blue Room with the Mayor. That was actually a habitual practice by the Mayor's security detail since April 27th, and this meeting is about veterans. We all take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution against all A-holes including the Mayor's NYPD Security Detail. His head or security is actually defending a federal civil rights lawsuit. On March 5th, he lost the motion in federal court. He's going to have to face trial for violating the Fourth Amendment Rights of a bicyclist in September of 2012. So, the question is if you're a mayor, would you let somebody who is defending your federal civil rights lawsuit be your top bodyguard while like me have to contend with him excluding me from a public meeting on April 27th in Long Island City, and proceed thereafter to continue to do that repeatedly while he's up for reelection. So, if you think about it, that's actually voter fraud. If I'm a whistleblower, if I've got a First Amendment Right to walk through the doors to say you claim to support

the hiring of veterans, but when I applied to your city agencies more than 20 times not once do I get granted an interview. When I get thrust into what's essentially a homeless shelter in the Bronx where the landlord pulled a bait and switch, I talked to Ms. Sullivan previously. She told me that she couldn't provide me with legal assistance despite the fact that HRA is giving her organization funding from taxpayers. So, I have meritorious claims, if I can prove each and every claim that I have, and I'm left to my own devices to deal with it in court, while I have other priorities to attend to such as--like HRA is doing business with a company that committed wage theft against me like six years--six years ago, again that business is being financed by taxpayers. So, if I'm sitting in this chair in front of you, I still haven't been paid for what I worked--worked six years ago, why in the hell should I be in a freaking shelter while HRA is claiming that it's permanent housing. Basically, on October 16th of 2016, I and other people signed valid enforcement apartment lease agreements at 33 Beaver Street. Immediately after doing that, the landlord pulled a bait and switch. So, if you don't know what a bait and switch is, it's

like shopping for a 4-door car, then the dealer gives you a 2-door car. So, essentially, you're left without a valid lease agreement, which causes you to be in temporary shelter not permanent housing. You made a remark earlier today about I guess wanting to do an on-site inspection to see how things are really like. I've got videos. I don't know if and when you might have the time, but there was a meeting in Kew Gardens on July 18th. This shows that I was standing next to the Mayor and Steven Banks while they essentially said we're not going to help you. The Mayor said that Mr. Banks would do as he says in terms of looking into this wage theft matter against Entity Data, the company that's doing business with them. He never did and said they renewed that contract. So, again, I'm sitting in this room in front of you and I still haven't been paid what I worked six years ago when I worked 50-hour weeks, and if you don't have, you know, [bell] your income to pay rent, that's going to cause problems, and just to close out, Steven Banks' wife is the Supervising Judge of the Housing Court citywide. So, you have a clear conflict-conflict or interest.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Thank you Towaki.

TOWAKI KOTAWA: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you so much for coming down today and testifying, and I want to thank once again—I want to thank Jonathan, Jacqueline and Towaki. Thank you for coming down today. I appreciate it. Thank you. I'm going to call my next panel. [pause] Coco Culhane, Kaitlin Hosey. If I mispronounced your names, please let me know. Edward McDonough. [background comments, pause] Is there an Edward McDonough? No, okay. Okay. Now, I'm not sure which one is who.

COCO CULHANE: I'm Coco

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Coco, okay.
[laughs]

COCO CULHANE: Should I proceed?

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Go ahead, yes.

COCO CULHANE: Hi. My name is Coco Culhane. I run the Veteran Advocacy Project out of the Urban Justice Center. We provide free legal services to low-income veterans and their families and we focus on working with those who have—are living with Post-Traumatic Stress, traumatic brain

injury and substance use disorders. So, I will skip reading through my testimony and just—I think one of the points that's been made a lot throughout the creation of the Department of Veterans Services, which we fully have supported, is the idea that veterans are in every population throughout New York City and access services besides just through DVS, right. I mean veterans use job centers. Veterans use, you know, Workforce 1 and all these different things. So, I'm here today to urge City Council to take a look at the legal funding that you are providing through your initiative because you're not funding organizations that actually do veterans law. There is a very big unmet need in New York City for—particularly for a population of veterans that's often overlooked those who have left in honorable discharges. There are hundreds of thousands of federal dollars on the table for these veterans if a lawyer can come in and get them access to the VA. We partner with all kinds of organizations, terrific places that are on your list, Jericho, SUS. We've just started a partnership with Community Healthcare Network so that veterans and their families who don't have access to the VA can get primary care services,

et cetera. So, as—as you’ve seen, there are a lot of veterans who need lawyers, but they’re getting them. They’re getting them through the right to counsel and the Housing Court Initiative, right. They’re getting lawyers through Social Security project funding from the state. All of these things, these needs are being met. Veterans who actually need a lawyer who works on veterans law, and works on issues before the Department of Defense. They are not having their needs met. So, I just urge the Council to take a look at that, and take a look at the way those legal dollars are being spent right now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, thank you. Coco, if you—if you would like, we could set up a meeting--

COCO CULHANE: [interposing] Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --in my office. I’d like to talk more about that definitely because it’s not enough in three minutes. So, you could reach out to have—tell the—the Deputy Chief of Staff here. Okay, okay, Katlin.

KAITLIN HOSEY: Yes, Kaitlin Hosey from Live on New York. I am happy to be here today, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. Live on

New York, just to start, as you know, represents a lot of non-profits throughout the city that run programs such as senior centers, and the gamut of senior services. The reason we wanted to come here today to also offer the older adult perspective in the Veterans Committee is given the fact that more than 50% of New York veterans are over the age of 65. So, the two issues are often linked, and what a senior may need or what's good for all seniors is also good for many of the veteran population. The second highest cohort of veterans actually are ages from 55 to 64. So, the older adult population is huge within veterans themselves. Further, I just wanted to give an example of how often the needs are very similar. The highest percentage of veterans that participate in SNAP the food stamp program, are older veterans. So, with this said, there are often hunger challenges for an older veteran, and we wanted to highlight the fact that the Department for the Aging can also help to serve these—these individuals if they choose not to maybe go through the traditional routes of services, and they're—they're—any individual over the age of 60 would be welcome to the Department for the Aging Senior Center Services,

and we just wanted to highlight that. As you mentioned previously a lot of needs are—the population of veterans are getting their needs met through a number of agencies in the city. With that said, we wanted to thank the Council for their continued support of older New Yorkers and veterans. Throughout the years it's been truly a constant, and we thank you for the opportunity to highlight the linkages between these two populations today. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, if you would just repeat what—what you mentioned about SNAP. You're saying that there are veterans that are not on SNAP who are eligible for SNAP?

KAITLIN HOSEY: I don't have the data on under like lack of utilization. The—specifically what I was able to find was the fact that of the veterans who are on SNAP, the number of veterans that are using SNAP are more like to be older veterans. So--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, okay.

KAITLIN HOSEY: -that cohort is using

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

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2 KAITLIN HOSE: --SNAP at a higher at a
3 higher rate essentially.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, great.
5 Alright. Thank you so much.

6 KAITLIN HOSEY: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.
8 Alright, I think that ends our first Veterans
9 Committee and I'm going to try to flip this over like
10 I usually do. If I miss, alright, everyone's
11 watching? [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date March 29, 2018