

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

Committee on Veterans

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March 14, 2019  
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HELD AT: City Hall Committee Room

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Paul Vallone  
Mathieu Eugene  
Alicka Ampy-Samuel  
Alan N. Maisel

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

Loree Sutton, Commissioner  
NYC Department of Veterans Services, DVS

Jeff Roth, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Veteran Services, DVS

Eric Henry, Legal Counsel

Coco Culhane, Founder and Director  
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Dao Sun (sp?), Senior Staff Attorney  
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Maria Hunter, Director of Public Benefits  
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Ryan Foley, Coordinating Attorney  
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Cathy Cramer, CEO  
Legal Information for Families Today,  
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Lisa Carling, Director  
TDF Accessibility Programs

Robert Wadiack (sp?)  
Veteran at Samaritan Village

Jody Rudin, Chief Operating Officer  
Project Renewal

Nicole Cicogna, Executive Director  
GallopNYC

Courtney Orr, Director of Individual  
Engagement  
Row New York

Tom Webber, Director of Care Management  
SAGE

Rhonda Sherwin  
Veteran's financial coach



1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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2 [sound check] [background comments]

3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sound check for the  
4 Committee on Veterans Preliminary Budget of March  
5 14th, 2019 being recorded by Israel Martinez. City  
6 Hall Committee Room scheduled for 2:30.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [gavel] Good  
8 afternoon, everyone and welcome to the City Council  
9 Committee on Veterans Fiscal 2020 Preliminary Budget  
10 Hearing. I am Councilman Chaim Deutsch, Chair of the  
11 Veterans Committee. Today we will be hearing from  
12 Loree Sutton, the commissioner of the Department of  
13 Veteran Services or DVS. Thank you, Commissioner,  
14 for testifying before the committee today. The  
15 Department of Veterans Services Fiscal 2020 Budget  
16 totals 5.2 million, including 4.2 million and  
17 personal service funding to support 47 full-time  
18 positions. Established by local law 113 of 2015.  
19 The department is now in its third year of operation.  
20 DVS is an important institution with a mission to  
21 ensure that the concerns of the New York City's over  
22 200,000 veterans are heard and addressed. Now that  
23 the agency is up and running, it is the job of this  
24 committee to make sure that DVS is making the best  
25 use of its resources and fulfill this mission as best

as it can. With the goal in mind, we hope to gain a clearer understanding of DVS' efforts to identify what are the most pressing concerns for the New York City's veteran community and what actions the department has taken to confront these issues. We would like to develop a better picture and how to DVS is collecting and analyzing data and how the recent launch of Vet Connect will impact these efforts. We would like to gain greater insight on the day-to-day operations of DVS community outreach, mental health, and homelessness prevention program areas and want to learn more about the work DVS does in the realm of veteran employment. I would like to thank the following: financial analyst, Zach Harris, committee counsel, Muzat Soudri (sp?), policy analyst, Michael Kurtz, and my Deputy Chief of Staff who is here, Tova Chatzinoff, and I'd like to recognize my colleagues, members of the committee: council member Mathieu Eugene, council member Alan Maisel, council member Paul Vallone. Thank you, Commissioner, for being here, once again, today and I would like to ask the committee counsel to please swear in the Commissioner. Thank you.

LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before the committee and to respond honestly to councilmember questions?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I do. [pause]

Good afternoon, Chair Deutsch and the esteemed members of the New York City Committee on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton and, as always, I am honored to serve as the founding Commissioner of the New York City Department of Veteran Services. I am joined today by Deputy Commissioner, Jeff Roth, and legal counsel, Eric Henry. We are pleased to testify at today's preliminary budget hearing. As you know, DVS was created in 2016 to facilitate access to and coordination with organizations and entities throughout New York City that serve our veterans community. The agency has grown remarkably over a few short years in both the staffing and reach. Since inception, the agency has gone from a staff of four to current complement of 36 with multiple employee hires expected to occur in the near term to fill our 11 remaining vacant positions. Our staffing reaches across focus areas including: administration

and operations, outreach and employment assistance, peer mentoring and whole health services, veterans homelessness, pressing communications, legal and intergovernmental affairs, and public-private partnerships. In the design of this new agency, our strategic operational model includes the use of information technology to drive digital innovation of traditional service delivery as a critical component to increase DVS reach to the city's veteran community. Our Vet Connect NYC platform, launched in November 2018, is what we veterans like to call a force multiplier. Vet Connect NYC serves to connect veterans, active military, national guardsmen, reservists, and their families to a growing network of vetted veteran centric service providers through the personalized hands on efforts of a coordination team of social service professionals. Organizations to the network span the range of life needs and areas including legal services, housing, mental health assistance, education, and deployment. We will continue to evaluate our capacity to grow Vet Connect NYC and our technology infrastructure systems to meet the needs and strengths of our veteran community. Our proposed fiscal year 2020 budget of 5.2 million



dollars is essentially flat as compared with the modified FY 2019 barring the addition of one new position who will serve as our legislative advocacy specialist and serve as an ombudsman to facilitate effective communication and timely action with respect to city Council discretionary funds allocated to increasing community veterans services. While it may appear that our OTPS budget has been reduced, this also remains static as we are working with OMB to shift appropriate funding for the Pay for Success Initiative to FY 20. Pay for Success is a three year employment outcomes project which I will describe in later detail later in the testimony. At the heart of our agency's mission is direct outreach to our nearly 1/2 million veteran and veteran family population. Connecting with these cherished citizens is a challenge, as they are a divergent group spanning in age from their early twenties to centenarians like Manhattan born, but Brooklyn raised Sidney Walton, his one hundredth birthday we recently celebrated at our office. Our varied population has experienced radically different military and wartime experiences, returned home with unique medical and mental health conditions, and, most poignantly, communicate and

socialize indistinct and predictably disparate ways. Our population, not all of whom self-identify as veterans, is also spread out over the 302 square miles of New York City's five boroughs, presenting additional challenges to providing critical in person outreach. We are tackling these challenges by developing a multipronged communication and outreach approach to convey relevant and meaningful information about the programs and services specifically targeted to different segments of our veteran community. We are also growing our social media footprint, including our new sit rep podcast series. We've got a new version that's coming out this week. A new episode. I think it is episode number 7 and we have 16 that have been recorded. Some more to follow. Other actions and progress include increasing visibility within the outer borough community, radio, newspaper, and broadcast platforms. I'd like to just briefly summarize some of these subpopulations of our community that we reach out to engage and assist. First of all, our post-9/11 veterans-- At the last committee hearing, we talked about the Veterans Success Network with the three pillars designed to create pathways to

employment and education, mentoring, as well as to business and entrepreneurship. Reaching out to veterans of all eras, we are excited to describe our recent merger creating the Engagement and Community Services team. This increases our capacity to conduct comprehensive in person outreach and, while this merger has temporarily limited our outreach team's capacity to process assistance requests, as is reflected in the 2019 PMMR, we fully expect this team to, not only regain its former capacity, but actually become stronger as Vet Connect NYC merges-- Correction. Vet Connect NYC matures and we complete the staffing and cross training for this new team.

Unemployed or underemployed veterans diagnosed with PTSD. At the last hearing, we described the veteran's employment Pay for Success project. It's another example of how our city is taking bold steps to find creative solutions to address New York City's veteran employment needs. This is the first ever cross governmental Pay for Success project in the country that brings together city, state, and federal partners and is the second

ever Pay for Success program to be operationalized in our city.

Veterans with mental health needs.

Again, we covered this in extensive detail last testimony, but chose to briefly recap, Vet Thrive NYC is a program aimed at increasing help seeking behavior and social engagement moving the front lines of healing from clinic to community. DVS uses a collective framework-- Collective impact framework featuring coordinated care network, Vet Connect NYC that ensures veterans and their families can access whole of life services through expanded access and connection to care services and resources. In light of the ongoing national veterans suicide epidemic, we are also incorporating the Columbia Protocol, a leading evidence-based tool to identify risk and prevent suicide for widespread dissemination and use within the NYC veteran community. We also, as we talked about last time, we conduct mental health first aid training. Combined with the work that DOHMH has done and DVS had done, we have trained nearly 500 individuals in the MHA for veteran's module. Further, this training takes place out in the community and available to anyone who is

interested in either chest taking the training or becoming a train the trainer.

Homeless veterans. We continue our campaign to end veteran homelessness. Through peer to peer assistance we have, over the last three and a half years moved 680 veteran into permanent affordable housing. Our housing resource generation efforts, we've worked with NYCHA to be the first city in the country to pilot a program to house disconnected veterans and their families who are not eligible for VA housing assistance. We're also moving more veterans into the city's affordable housing stock. Since the team was formed in calendar year 2015, there has been a 64 percent increase in veterans approved for Mitchell Lama housing and a 90 percent increase in veterans moving into NYCHA housing. I just want to give a brief shout-out to local law 23 and I know council member Vallone, that was a bill that you championed and it reflects our growing capacity to be able to identify and who among our community is using city services. Our housing stability services providing the essential aftercare and constituent teamwork day-in day-out-- I just want to read-- There a little success story here and

we get these stories on a regular basis, but let me just share this example of a veteran we housed just last month.

Ms. Kay is an army veteran. She's struggling with severe PTSD and generalized anxiety, panic disorder, and depression, but she'd not eligible for VA healthcare or housing assistance. When our team started working with Ms. Kay and her husband on December 14th last year, they had been homeless for 842 days. We are so proud of our team. On February 4th, just seven weeks later, Ms. Kay and her husband moved into their own home with one of the special new vouchers to ensure that, one, their rent is subsidized in perpetuity and, two, that she gets the mental health treatment that she has earned.

Moving on to women veterans. This last year, we're so proud of being one of the partners that brought together the dedication ceremony for the first monument ever to honor the service of women veterans in a national cemetery. We will continue our efforts to reach out to women veterans knowing that their particular needs and strengths.

Moving on to LGBTQ veterans, we are painfully aware that many of our LGBTQ veterans were

discharged with less than honorable status and, as a result, may not qualify for the array of federal and state benefits. But I am pleased to say that, here in New York City, no veteran who applies for city benefits is ever turned away from consideration due to discharge, sexual orientation, length of service, or any other identifier. We had a chance just this last week to go and meet with the SAGE folks at their Manhattan center and I know that we are going to deepen our work going forward and they are currently being vetted as a provider for our Vet Connect NYC network. And, Mr. Chair, I know that you've recently met with the SAGE team, as well, and I thank you for your support.

Veteran families, caregivers, and survivors. This is an area recognizing that nobody serves alone. Families serve, too. We are a member of Elizabeth Dole foundation's Hidden Heroes Initiatives. We also work with the tragedy assistance program for survivors, as well as the American Red Cross military veterans and caregiver network. Through presentations, scheduled appointments, walk-ins, a 24-hour national hotline for survivors, this is a population that we are

increasingly working together, both locally and national, to enhance our connectivity and our assistance. I have been recently appointed to the Federal Advisory Committee on families, caregivers, and survivors and I look forward to sharing is best practice as well as bringing best practices back to New York City.

Finally, I just like to highlight our important partnership with the DVS. DVS and the city's Veterans Advisory Board. I see Joe Bello here today, our secretary, and there may be others from the Veterans Advisory Board. Diverse range of service backgrounds, professional expertise to help facilitate dialog. We just held our last VAB meeting this week at the Veterans Innovation Lab led by James Hendon, who is here today, and supported by NYU. We are very excited about our new and refreshed VAB with the continuity of our continued veterans who are continuing to serve on this important board, as well as our new members. I would just ask you check out the VAB annual report. It's on the DVS website and it really illustrates the care and commitment that the VAB brings to their work. In closing, DVS firmly believes that all veterans, men and woman, and their



families are our city's and our nation's leading natural, renewable resource. What's to be renewed? Their commitment to and their capacity for continued service on behalf of others. We look forward to discussing with you how we can best support our veterans in finding resources and services that will provide them with a renewed and continued sense of purpose, mission, stability, and community. Thank you, again, for providing me this privilege of representing the interest of New York City's veterans and family members with you today. At this time, I would be happy to address any questions.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you. First, I just want to thank the Veterans Advisory Board for their annual report. I see a lot of work was put into it. I didn't completely read it. I'm halfway done, but I look forward to reading it over and over and over just to get the information that they worked so well and really went through and put-- you know, how much work they went through to put this together. And also, Commissioner, I want to thank you for your follow up on several of the-- some of this-- the last several hearings on doing outreach. For one,

the GI bill letting-- making sure people take advantage of the GI bill.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I saw you have already retweeted, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Yeah. We got it.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Perfect.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And as well as the Thrive NYC mental health support for veterans. So that's extremely important and also from, you know, coming out of the last hearing, I think a lot was accomplished in regards to Thrive. I've met with-- with Susan Herman and she did say a lot of work needs to be done and she already followed up with giving me a full report-- I think it's almost complete, actually-- on the services that they provide within my district and there's a lot more work that needs to be done. She apologized for the lack of outreach that she has done, not only in my district, but throughout the city and she is still new. She just came in a few weeks ago and she-- we're going to give her a chance to prove the information gets out and that people get the services that they deserve through reading about it, knowing about the mental

health services that Thrive NYC has to offer. So, we still have a lot to do on the and I know there is a hearing now coming up with Thrive NYC. When is going to be an oversight hearing that, again, since we need to make sure that the funding that they have is well spent and well publicized and to make sure it is getting to the right people. So I'm glad that came out of the last hearing. So, DVS has a budget, a headcount, 47 full-time positions and, as of February, DVS has 38 active employees. This is a 19 percent vacancy rate. What current vacancies are better at DVS?

COMMISSIONER BISHOP: Sure. We've got 11 vacancies at present and, of those, we have four that have been posted and the postings have been removed and now they are going through the process of interviewing. That would be for the Chief Information Officer, Director of Housing Initiatives, the Assistant Commissioner of Engagement and Community Services, as well as the Human Resources Generalist. We also have currently for postings that are online. The city's platform for job postings. There are two postings for an Engagement and Community Service Coordinators, as well as a posting

for our Digital Outreach Manager and a Senior Policy Analyst and then we have three additional positions that were currently putting together the position descriptions and will be posting within the next week to 10 days.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, what is the process that-- like how soon do you think these positions will be filled from when you post that? You to the postings and then when you get--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
Well--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: for eligible candidates?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. It's a good question. From the time that we remove the postings-- We got her a very involved interview process. It's a three stage process where we ensure that members from across our agency are able to meet with in three rounds, tiered rounds, of interviews and we have a matrix in formal reporting procedure. Typically, that takes anywhere from two to three weeks depending on how many candidates we have and how difficult it may be to schedule into aligned calendars. From the time that we have selected our

top tier, maybe the final three, candidates, and that's when Jeff as Deputy Commissioner and myself will interview the candidates and then we will proceed to make our final ranking and turn it over to HR for actual negotiations. So it's a process. I would anticipate that for these 11 possessions, given that four of them are already to the point where they have been posted and we are currently ranking the candidates and bringing them in for interviews, I would guess that within this next quarter, certainly through the end of this budget cycle in June, we will have our full complement back on board. I will tell you that it's important to note that with any startup, there is always attrition for a variety of reasons and we are very much aware of this. This is one of the reasons why we invest so heavily in training and team building and our culture, but there is no question about it that for every individual who is drawn to work in a startup, not every individual, it turns out, is ideally prepared or able to work in a startup. And even within phases of a startup. I've had the privilege of starting up several organizations during my professional life and there are some predictable phases where individuals who

just, you know, worked so well during the honeymoon phase, let's say, but then as the organization starts getting a little bigger and you start having processes and it becomes more formalized and more professionalized, then, you know, some of the folks who thrived early on, perhaps that is not a good fit going forward. But we take great pride in building a capable, talented, diverse team of DVS staff members and we work with them every day to help equip and prepare them to best serve our veterans and their families.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Where do you post these job opportunities?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, we post them on the city site. Do you want to add anything to that, Jeff?

JEFF ROTH: NYCAPS, LinkedIn, as well as just word of mouth recruiting, as well.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do all the VAB members, the advocates, do they get an email about these openings so they can spread around this--

JEFF ROTH: We generally put the postings in our newsletter, as well, and the VAB members are-- see that.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I just wanted-- I  
3 just like to recommend if you could-- if you don't  
4 mind, if you could send it out to all the advocates  
5 to see if, maybe, if they know someone because they  
6 work on these issues each and every day. So, I think  
7 if anyone has a good candidate, I think we could get  
8 something from them. And we are talking-- we're  
9 constantly talking about bringing more job  
10 opportunities to veterans, so this way we could  
11 spread this around in the veteran community to hire  
12 potential veterans just like in other committees I  
13 always fight for the veterans. Surely in the  
14 veterans committee, I want to make sure that the  
15 veterans have the first opportunity to have some of  
16 these-- to have these job openings.

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely, Chair  
18 Deutsch. And just as recently as this last week at  
19 our VAB meeting in Brooklyn I had a chance to sit  
20 with the VAB and I let them know about some of these  
21 positions, as well as been informed the group that  
22 was there for the public part of the hearing and will  
23 continue to send that out more broadly so that, you  
24 know, the veterans or veteran allies, veteran  
25 colleagues, members of our community are aware of

these vacancies because we are looking for the best talent that is out there. And we look forward to hearing from folks.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is the priority to hire a veteran?

Commissioner Sutton: On our job postings, we put veteran status is a plus, but we also know that-- In fact, early on, Chair Deutsch, in building this team I was asked, Commissioner, are you hiring all veterans at DVS? I thought about it for a moment and I came back and said, actually, yes. We are hiring all veterans of service. Some of us have served in the military, others in public service or community service, but service is our North Star and, when it comes to military veterans service status, it's about half and half right now within our agency and we really feel that having a team of folks that have served in the military, we have many folks who are spouses, as well as have direct family members, as well as those who are drawn to help work with this wordy population. So it's a team approach.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. I understand. So I appreciate the response, but they only thing is that when-- Like, for example, if I go



to speak about affordable housing for veterans,  
right, and I'm constantly advocating for veterans,  
veterans, veterans, no matter what committee I go to  
and who I speak with, so when they look at me and  
say, oh, but the veterans DVS doesn't have all  
veterans, so how are you advocating for veterans when  
DVS themselves don't have all veterans? So it just  
makes it a little more difficult. I just want--  
Plus, you know that if, in the future, for these rest  
of these vacancies, if we could try to target  
specifically to the veteran communities. This way we  
give the veterans the job.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Veteran status is a  
plus, Chair Deutsch.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

JEFF ROTH: In everything.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: In everything. You  
know, all other factors being equal, tie goes to the  
veteran, no question.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: There's no like a  
law against not targeting veterans, right, for these  
jobs?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No. Not at all.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: In fact, I think the federal VA, I think it's less than a third of their workforce is actually of veteran status, but I want to push back on a little bit on the notion that it takes a veteran to serve a veteran. Phil Cly (sp?), who lives here in New York City and has written widely about his experience with redeployment, he wrote an op-ed in the New York Times a couple of years ago that I think is so poignant. He talked about how so often there are these artificial boundaries that separate veterans and non-veterans. And sometimes veterans can kind of put up these barriers and kind of say, hey, if you are not a veteran, you know, you can't relate to me or citizens well-- nonveterans will say, well, I really don't know what to say other than thank you for your service. There are veterans and non-veterans alike that make up our team and we could not do a job without them. Reintegration is not just bringing together an enclave of veterans. It's about building a team that re-integrates with the entire community and we are blessed to have one of the most diverse and widely talented agencies and city government.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. I agree it does not take a veteran to serve a veteran, but it takes a veteran to get a job. So I just want to encourage that if we could fill the rest of the vacancies with people that served our country, and I know that soon number one priority--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [inaudible 27:45]

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And if there is no law against it, let's do it.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No. That's--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] You know?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: what we do.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I don't see why not.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That's what we do.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So the budget-- DVS fiscal 2018 adopted budget was for 4.4 million, but the department has ended up spending 3.6 million by the end of the year. Can you-- Commissioner, can you please explain this understanding?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Go ahead.

[inaudible 28:12]

JEFF ROTH: Yeah. I would venture to say that a lot of the underspending is due to PS accruals, so with a number of vacancies on the PS side, we're not spending money on those salaries. So, that accrues and what account for some amount underspending.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I'm sorry. Hold on one sec (sic). Do we have to--

LEGAL COUSEL: I can [inaudible 28:33]

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. So let's-- We have to swear you in.

LEGAL COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to councilmember questions?

JEFF ROTH: I do. So, yeah. The underspending could be accounted for, with the number of vacancies that we have on the PS side because we are not spending money on those salaries that accrues on the PS side, that would account for some of that underspending.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: In what areas in the budget did you spend less?

JEFF ROTH: Yeah. We can do a breakdown. We can send you a breakdown of where we have under spent, both on the PS side, as well as the OTPS side, but we will get some details together for you on that.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Thank you. Vet Connect was launched on November 11th in 2018, yet there is still funding of 514,000 and DVS budget and fiscal year 2010 for contract for Vet Connect. Is there still work being done on Vet Connect?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No. Go.

JEFF ROTH: Yeah. Absolutely. So, when Vet Connect launched on October 18th of this year and was announced by the Mayor at the Veterans Day breakfast, the program had already been underway as a pilot program in New York City. But with the formal launch, we've been working very closely with the team at the Institute of Veteran and Military Families out of Syracuse in better understanding how we can increase the number of referrals through that platform, connecting it with more veterans across the city, and finding ways that we can expand the network of service providers in the network itself. So, that

is something that teams both at DVS and with our partners are looking to expand.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. What types of data do you expect to be able to collect from Vet Connect?

JEFF ROTH: Yes. So, we are currently working to build pipelines to receive data from the Vet Connect NYC platform to our team where we can do some of that analysis, but some of the things that way to know is the-- who is calling. We learned a little bit about who they are and where they live in New York City. We learn a little bit about what service area that served and in the military and what of service, and we also know what they're calling about. So when a veteran calls the platform and they ask for assistance, we record those sorts of things so we can gain a picture of what sorts of services are in demand veterans.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. All right. Let's move on with-- I want to go into-- go a little bit into veteran suicide. Now, do we have a number of veterans that commit suicide annually here in New York City?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: To continue from the conversation--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yes.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: of the last hearing, Dr. Harrington and I are both working on this and we have reached out to both the VA as well as to the epidemiology experts within DOHMH and the Medical Examiner's Office and we will be working to see what we can create in terms of a accurate number at the city level for veteran suicide. At this point, we do not have that, as we talked about last hearing, but we are actively working towards that end.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How is DOHMH planning on collecting the data?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Oh. You know, will be able to lay it out for you once we have collected the information and meet together and then we will put together a plan, a strategy, and we will be glad to share that with you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Do you have a number of how many supportive housing units to offer veterans in the city of New York, as well as

set-asides where you have veterans living there? Do we have like--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: a total number?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, I don't have that right here. I know that Nicole Brank, our Assistant Commissioner and Senior Advisor is here and she recently talked to your office and gave all of that information, but we would be glad to give a follow up briefing with all of that information in it, Chair Deutsch.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Are the-- the areas where they have supportive housing and veteran housing-- Now, if a veteran would commit suicide and there's a suicide in one of those supportive housing facilities for affordable housing, and now are those suicides reported to anyone--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: within the veterans community?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That's why we need multiple data streams. So the VA will be about a help us out with veterans who have died by suicide who are enrolled to the VA. Are Medical Examiner's



Office be able to help us sort out all suicides here in New York City, including-- and, we work with them all the time now in terms of veteran death. When we have reason to believe that they might be a veteran, the medical examiner's office reaches out to us and we work with the VA to be able to validate that. So we've got-- You know, we've got a number of data sources that we need to bring together on this and we will let you know what we come up with. But we understand and we recognize that this is a very important set of data and it's also one of the reasons why-- I think I mentioned last week that we are working with Dr. Kelly Posner from Columbia to be able to widely train and disseminate the Columbia protocol, which is the world's leading evidence-based tool to identify suicide risk and prevent suicides. So this is terribly important. I just spoke with Joe Hunt from emotional vibrant health, who is hosting a communitywide training. We've trained our team. We are going to be putting together a citywide strategy to really get this tool out there.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, that supportive housing providers, are they required to report if

there is-- if there are any suicides facility? Are they required?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: For any death, there's going to be an investigation, so I-- I'll need to--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes. Because usually what happens is if there is a-- if there is a suicide, then 911 was called. They respond and--

COMMISSIONERS SUTTON: [interposing] I'll find out what their--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: protocol is, but certainly for any death, there is a protocol that the city goes through to determine cause of death and whether there was--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yeah.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: there was foul play or--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] But there's nothing above that. Like if it's in the veterans-- if it's in the veterans supportive housing, there is no other protocol than normal procedures when-- as a veteran commit suicide? Is there any other protocol besides--

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No.

3 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: the normal  
4 protocols?

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We'll need-- This  
6 is one of the things that Dr. Harrington and I are  
7 researching, so we'll let--

8

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Okay.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: you know what we  
11 find out.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. So, yeah.  
13 Because I spoke to Susan from Thrive and I want to  
14 bring in the first aide mental health into the  
15 supportive housing--

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: facilities to bring  
18 mental health. So I just want to know and I think  
19 it's important for us to know if, within those  
20 facilities, what the-- you know, and for how many  
21 veterans commit suicide. Because we know the veteran  
22 suicide is the highest amongst, you know, here in  
23 America. 20--

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] But  
25 this is--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 20 a day. And--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] This is one of the important sources of data and that's--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: why we are doing the research.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Because I-- It's just interesting because I know that you did quite a few-- Thrive have done quite a few mental health first aid trainings, so that information I think they should have known already and they are doing this training by-- You know, I think it's important for them to have the knowledge before they do the training just to know what they are dealing with in the veterans community, especially in the supportive housing. Okay. So I'm going to go to my colleagues because I don't want to keep Paul here all night. So, will go with Paul. Paul Vallone.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Say one other thing, Chair Deutsch, on--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I was that close, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I-- Just one moment--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [laughter]

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: council member  
Vallone.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: But I completely  
agree with the critical importance of is getting our  
arms around accurate data in terms of completed  
suicides. I'm equally invested in getting to the  
left of that suicidal behavior, that desperate  
position, and being able to train our supportive  
housing workers, as well as veteran residents in the  
use of both the Columbia Protocol and connection to  
resources through both our own outreach team, as well  
as our housing and support, veteran peer  
coordinators, and Vet Connect NYC. So, there is no  
one-size-fits-all or one cookie-cutter approach, but  
certainly to get a proven tool in the hands of those  
who can use it and save lives, that's... That's what  
this is... Is geared towards.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very much  
and I don't think anything-- I-- You know, it's in  
poor and working together and that's what these  
hearings are for. Just to bring some of these issues  
that we feel are lacking out to the hearing and then

let's work together to make sure that we get those numbers. We work with Thrive NYC. We bring those mental health first aid and we have the same goals and let's--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. And, you know--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: we'll work together to get it done.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Chair Deutsch, while we are talking about Thrive NYC, let me just say I would point to anyone who is seeing some of the latest concerns expressed, I would point you to an op-ed that Commissioner Barbot published in the daily news yesterday that talks about the city's historic and pioneering investment in caring for this seriously mentally ill. It's well worth reading for any of us who are concerned about this vital area.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair. And congratulations on doubling the councils initiatives last year, growing our involvement and engagement with our veterans and--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good afternoon, Commissioner, to your team. Always good to see everyone out there.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You know us and you know me. I'm always trying to fight to get us more, more, and more. So, this time of year it really is trying to take these preliminary budgets and telling whoever is deciding on the final numbers, we need more. So it is always our focus to bring more services. So that's where you're a tool in that process and we want to help you with that process. I see what your preliminary budget is here for us at 5.2 million for the preliminary and I look at our Council budgets and I have more than you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, that's not good. We need you-- if I'm dealing with just Northeast Queens and you are dealing with the whole city, we've got to get you more money. I would think that would be a good first step is to, at least, to try to double your budget. The amount of veterans that are in New York City at this point, are you

saying they are increasing, remaining the same,  
decreasing on an annual basis?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, on an annual basis because many of our veterans are at the middle or even approaching the end of life-- you know, 13 percent of our veterans are World War II veterans. 11 percent Korean War veterans. 29 percent Vietnam veterans. Many of them are experiencing the issues including end-of-life health issues and death at the same time that we have a vibrant community of both the Gulf War veterans, as well as post 9/11 veterans [background comment] who, increasingly are coming back to New York City, both native New Yorkers as well as folks like me who didn't grow up anywhere close to New York City. I think that, to the extent that we can continue to demonstrate our respect for veterans and our support for their continued service, we will continue to draw the train back to New York City.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But have you seen that number arrives or remain the same--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] But the--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: or do you--



COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] but the number-- the trend line at this point would be going down, as is the national trend line for veterans.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Because about 50 percent of them are elder veterans from Korean War in the past?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That is correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You know, I wasn't even thinking of bringing, but since there is such a huge percentage of seniors and are elder populations, there is probably room for us to have a joint effort with DFTA.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We also sit on-- We just yelled for more money for all of our seniors, also. But I don't see any particular program that DFTA is working for veterans and I'm wondering if that might be something we can tackle.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So [coughs] Excuse me. Just last month we had a three hour session with the DTFA team and we are currently folding the senior centers into our strategy. We are in the midst of Deputy Commissioner Roth is leading a 90 day strategy

task force for our new engagement and community services strategy and we recognize absolutely DFTA's part of that.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Please, reach out. We'd love to be part of that.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We have transformed elder law and Adult Protective Services in the needs for seniors from the simplest of forms of powers of attorney and health care proxy and elder law planning and aging. And lots of our veterans are on their own trying to prepare that.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: As we provide lawyers for everyone else, we better be providing lawyers for our veterans so that they can provide for themselves and their families. I think we have to do a lot more there and I think that's something that--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
There's no doubt.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: that's something that we can start immediately.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: The numbers that Chair Deutsch mentioned on the amount of veterans that we have reached, because the PMMR states there is 7500 veterans and families in fiscal 2018. How do we get those numbers?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So we have-- In fact, I'll let Deputy Commissioner Roth described, but it's been an ongoing evolution, as you know, to develop our data systems. Jeff, do you want to--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Yeah. So the--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: elaborate?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: the numbers on the estimates for the number of veterans in New York City, part of it comes from the senses. Part of it also comes from-- that would account for federal veterans. Part of the numbers come from the Department of Defense when we had an outreach with them on--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, that's total--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: He's talking about--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: number of  
veterans.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: PMMR.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: How do we know  
the-- we can determine the total number of veterans  
today, but how do we determine the veterans that are  
actually reached and serviced by DVS?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Oh, sure.  
Yeah. Absolutely. So, outreach team, anytime we  
interact with a veteran, we account for that. So we  
call that an engagement. That could be at an event  
where we are providing information, say at a jobs  
fair or tabling--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Is there also  
that same type of data from other agencies coming to  
you since you're not, sometimes, the original point  
of contact?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: That's  
correct. Not yet, but that is something that we're  
actively looking to build out. One key note is we  
just hired our very first data and reporting expert  
back in October, so this person has been on staff and  
is building out that area for us. So, both working  
with the data that we had internally and organically

2 within the agency, working out to sister agencies to  
3 find out what data they have related to veterans and  
4 how we can pull that into the agency to increase our  
5 understanding, as well as the Vet Connect NYC peace  
6 and building pipelines there so we can use that data  
7 to inform our picture, as well.

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Let me just--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]  
10 Well, I mean-- Before you jump in, Commissioner,  
11 not--

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: knowing the  
14 amount of interagency action with veterans is  
15 disturbing because how do we have a number when you  
16 are the smallest agencies and our other agencies are  
17 dealing with veterans every day. I want you to have  
18 that information. That goes back to when the  
19 corrections didn't have files on their detainees and  
20 inmates at Rikers until we forced. That house to  
21 be-- And I know the com-- Chair Deutsch has been  
22 calling for that data and we have to have that for  
23 you to determine these budgets and determine going  
24 forward because, clearly, it's not just DVS dealing  
25 with a veteran. Whether it's DFTA or whether it DOT,

whether it is buildings, whether it's landlords, there's a numerous amount of that going on. You need that data.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. And if I could just say, you know, I think local law 23 was a great initial step and I'm really happy to report that, subsequently, led by council member Chin, local law 127 which is we worked with the Mayor's Office of Operations to ensure that the veterans self-identification question is on that citywide identification form. And that form-- You know, it's still in the pilot stage, but it's being used at DSS, ACS, DHS, DOHMH, DFTA, as well as DYCD and DOE. So, we are very eager to see what we can find out, what we can learn from our population. It is a self-identification option, so it's not mandatory, but we are continuing to work, you know, to help our community understand--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, for example, when there is a new case management files started--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And DFTA or any agency starts that file, one of the boxes that we

forced them to create is whether they are a veteran or not.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Are you getting that information?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, what we have, we-- Up until this point, we have not had the capacity or the ability to get that information. It has not been on the form. This is now a new form that has come out just within the last few months, so it's in the early stage of adoption.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's gonna (sic) be a huge task. You're going to need-- Just the amount of volume of those case manage that's gonna come to you once this begins is going to be not just data collection, but going through it and seeing what services they are actually applying for. It's going to double-- at least double your staff. I don't want to take--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: up the Chair's-- My last question would be I just want to fight for you to have that.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And the other thing is since Chair Deutsch managed to lobby to get doubling of the amount of the Council initiatives-- [sneeze] God bless you. The amount-- How those contracts are awarded, how they are maintained and accounted for is not done through DVS. Is that something that we can try to change going forward? Would you rather manage those initiatives through DVS or would rather keep them [background comments] in the other agencies where they are now?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay. At this point, managing the 58 contracts, for example, that represent this fiscal year's investment by the city Council, that is so far beyond our capacity and our stage of evolution. We could not possibly manage that load. Howev--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] Do they give you the accountability of how those programs are going? Do you get the updates--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] So--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: and the account--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'm s--



COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I just want to make sure you're still running that ship--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] So glad--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: the way you wanted.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'm so glad you asked because the individual that we are bringing on that we have been funded to higher to join Eric's team with our advocacy and intergovernmental affairs, one of the roles will be the role of an ombudsman. That individual will be the go-between tracking those contracts, working with the city agencies, working with the community based organizations to make sure that there is no hiccups and that it goes as fast as possible. So we are--

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] These are all much-needed employment resumes that are going to be coming into your agency.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair. And I also echo your concerns on the mental health thrive collaborative with veterans because, to this day, my district still does not have any

participation and we have one of the largest veterans populations. So, much needed work needs to be done on that. Much work. Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, regarding the-- To continue the conversation from council member Vallone on the data collection, what type of data does DVS collect or obtain regard the veteran demographics?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'm sorry?

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Regarding veterans demographics throughout New York City, like what type of-- like what you do? How do you collect all the data?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. So, what we can do is we have just recently redesigned our intake forms. We would be glad to share that with you, but it collects a variety of data in terms of area of service and, of course gender and particular need and we work very closely with veterans whether they come to us by a walk-in or a call in and we have a standard data intake form now that collects a variety

of demographic information. I'd be glad to share that with you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So does it get entered into a system? A soft-- So how does that work? How many people do you have that collects the data like in the office within DVS? Like when information comes and from the peer counselors, right? The peer counselors go out in all five boroughs and I'm sure they have to bring back information, right? Then it comes back into the office to DVS and then how does-- What is the process? How does it work?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. So the outreach specialists, they enter their workload into the CRM and then Pedro Zapato, who is here, he is the individual that Jeff mentioned earlier who was come on board to do our data and reporting. He then works with our team to make sure that that data is clean. That it can be accurately reported, and then, has just mentioned earlier, we are working with IVMF to ensure that the Vet Connect NYSE data comes forward, as well. So it's a complex process, but we are excited to be in a position where, in real time-- and this gets back to your point, Chair-- Council member

Vallone. With Vet Connect NYSE, we are in a position with the advanced tech platform, that we can monitor real-time usage of resources, care, and services and then we are in a position to be able to advocate when there are clear shortages or when things are not going in the direction that had been initially anticipated.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I don't understand. Why is it a complex process? I'm just trying to understand. Like why is the day the receiving the data and putting it into-- entering it into your statistics in regards to different categories--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: like why is that complex? I mean, I don't-- I'm just-- Like all give you an example. In my office when people call in or they walk in or we go out to events, everything gets logged in by categories. Everything is done the same day. By the time--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: When 5 o'clock rolls around--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: we're done.

Everything is in the system. And if I-- Like I mentioned that the Thrive-- at the Mental Health Committee, that I could call my office now and, within five minutes, I could get exact data of every walk-in, call, event--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: that we have, participants-- Everything is comput-- Everything is entered into a computer in data and I could get that information within five minutes. I could give you a breakdown by category. So, when you say it is complex, like I am just wondering why is--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] What is complex, Chair, is to develop a data system from scratch.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. So that's what I'm trying--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So what it--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: to understand.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: What that entails, then-- You know, you have five square miles in your district. That's great that you have an evolved system that you are able to provide that kind of

real-time data. That's where we are working towards and I will tell you that the strives that we have made just in these last few months getting our personnel on board, cross training our team, and making sure that the data that we enter is clean data. There always has to be a cross check. There has to be a process. There has to be, first of all, an infrastructure platform to even collect the data. So, for example, for our CRM, we started collecting data in July 2017, brought on board the first phase of our CRM. We are now in the process of working with the CRM contractor so that we can customize it so that it fits the way in which we actually work. So it's a process. It is not a lock key moment in time.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, that's what I'm trying to figure out. So, for example, when I got elected in two thou-- Commissioner, I'm having a conversation. I'm not-- This is an open conversation that just happens to be at a hearing, and oversight hearing because of the committee. But I represent 190,000, approximately 190,000, people in my district. Right? You have 210,000 veterans,

right? So I have almost the same amount of constituents--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: as DVS has and we have veterans here in the city of New York.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And when I got elected, from day one, I had the system up and running from day one. So I can-- Like if a constituent walks into me and says, I need services and I respond to the constituents, you have to give me six months or a year to get my foundation put in, get up and running, they are not going to vote for me again. I'm out of office in 2017. So I built my foundation on day one just to make sure that I have the data. I'm not talking about everything-- I'm not talking about everything else that goes on in the veteran community. I'm talking about just having that data--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: and having that stats. So, maybe someone needs to look at how your system works at DVS and how to better streamline that

system and how to better get the information from the peer counselors, from advocates--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: from providers and bring that information in because once the system is in place, then you aren't time. Everything runs automatic and it runs well.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So I'm not-- I'm not trying to come here and just to say, oh, you know, and to complain. I want to work together with DVS--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Great.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I would, you know, work with you, the Commissioner, and your staff to make sure that we are able to work together whatever resources, city resources, you need, we will help you out. We have no problem. We'll help out your staff at DVS to make sure that we're up and running. This way, we don't go from one hearing to the next and go back and forth regarding certain stats and certain issues that are going on. We could do a lot of stuff offline. We don't have to do everything at a hearing. We can do a lot of stuff offline and let's



get up and running. This way, it's a well-oiled machine.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, that's exactly what we're doing. I'm happy to sit down with you offline, as well, Chair. You know, the internal data-- First, we had to develop the infrastructure in the system and the reporting channels. Now we have that in place. Getting the external data is a little more challenging, but we are working that. But for example, in our most established line of action, our depart-- our housing and support services, you know, we have real-time data on those numbers every single day and that where we are working towards. There is no daylight between your-- the value you place on data and the value that we place on data. In fact, since this hearing began, Assistant Commissioner Branca has just informed me that we have had two moves since the hearing began. So, this is where we are moving towards. Happy to lay it down for you in terms of what the roadmap is and where we are projected to go, but we are so excited because just as Chair-- as council member Vallone knows, just a very short time ago, we didn't have really anything that we can point to in terms of data. So, it is a

work in progress and no money is more impatient about this than I am, Chair Deutsch, and I'm happy to share with you the details because we are very proud of the progress we have made, but we also know we've got a long ways to go and we are on that journey.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And I'm willing to help you with that process. So, I just want to say, regarding the housing, when I did my research about six months ago, there were about, I think, 28 units that were unoccupied.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: For veterans.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Specifically for veterans. So I did send an email in a meeting with DVS asking about the 28 empty vacant apartments that need to go to-- that are meant for veterans. So when the numbers-- when you have that tracking, when you have those numbers, on that phone conversation the response should have been, oh, of course. 28 vacant apartments. This is why it's vacant and you start giving the reasons why. But they should know why those 28 apartments were vacant.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I received a response about a month later, right, and in the-- within the month, I didn't get any type of correspondence of why they were vacant and then DVS had to look in to see exactly why they were vacant. What I'm trying to say is it doesn't need to be a request of me to try to figure out why-- and ask a question why are these apartments empty. And if I do ask, the response should be-- and if anyone asks, you know, the response should be, oh, we have that. We know that. We have data. These are the reasons and everything. But it did take a month before I received a response why these apartments are vacant because they really had to look into it and make phone calls and see why it is vacant and see which ones are vacant. Those numbers should be in already. Those numbers should be at the fingertips of DVS. And this is what I'm talking about. That I'm sure you have statistics, but there is a lot more that we need to do because when I went to visit the supportive housing and they told me there was a vacancy and I asked them why is this apartment vacant? They said that the veteran just passed away and it was-- the NYPD came down and sealed the

apartment. So, and it takes like three or four weeks before it gets unsealed. The detective needs to come down to unseal it. Sometimes they take their sweet time. So I brought this up with the police commissioner. And I asked him, please, if it's one of the veterans housing, please make sure and send out a memo to the detectives that they should reopen that apartment as soon as they can and there should not be any gap of services because there are too many veterans, even one, too many veterans waiting for housing and why should they be homeless and be in a shelter for more than one second if they could find themselves supportive housing or permanent housing. So this is what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the data that, if, tomorrow, if I find out that there are few vacancies out one of the veteran house Amen I call up DVS, the question is am I going to get the response right? Does DVS have all this data? Like maybe now they have it, but I did bring it up about six months ago and it took a month before I got a response of why they were vacant.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes. So, certainly we would not want a month to go by-- That's an unacceptable delay, so I apologize for that delay,

but I-- what I can tell you is that we will always work to make sure that whatever data we share, that it is accurate, that it is up to date, that it's-- That we're inclusive. We're working right now with HRA to create more frequent data reporting cycles. You know, our team of five veteran peer coordinators is responsible-- You know, it's about five percent of the workforce across the city that is working to house veterans and may punch well above their weight. But we don't have direct visibility in real time over the entire stock, but we are working towards that end--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: because we know that responsiveness-- We're as anxious as you are to get-- If there's an empty apartment to be had that veteran can get out of shelter and move into, we are as anxious as you are to make sure that that happens, so we will continue to work with you and work with you and provide timely information as he requested.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Doesn't HRA have a veteran liaison?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: HRA had-- In fact, they've just recently hired an additional veteran

1 outreach specialist, but Assistant Commissioner  
2 Branca works with HRA, works with DHS. I mean, we've  
3 got contacts throughout the agencies across the city.  
4 HPD. NYCHA. We've got numerous contacts across the  
5 city depending upon what kind of information it is  
6 that we made.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, why isn't it  
9 that those liaisons who work for HRA, who work for  
10 NYCHA, shouldn't they be responsible to report this  
11 information to DVS and, if yes, why aren't they doing  
12 it? And if they are not doing it, why are they still  
13 a veteran liaison?

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, the veteran--  
15 The agency veteran liaisons. Yes. Now I'm tracking  
16 with you. Yes. Each agency has a veteran liaison  
17 and that individual is a point of contact when we  
18 have a veteran or somebody that we are working with  
19 who has an issue that is pertaining to that agency.  
20 Then we work with them and we collaborate with them  
21 to find a solution, but that's-- that's apart from  
22 the data work that we do with agency the agency to be  
23 able to keep track of and to collaborate on ensuring  
24 accuracy to data and the timeliness of reporting.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do those veteran liaisons, is that what they do all day? Being a veteran liaison or they do other work and they may just work on veteran issues five minutes a day?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, it depends upon the day, but they are-- that is not there full-time job.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So why-- So, we need to hold-- You know, a veteran, when they-- When a person in the military sites for our country--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: it's a full-time job, right? When they are veteran, they are veteran 24 hours a day seven days a week. So, when HRA as a veteran liaison or NYCHA has a veteran liaison, maybe this is where we have to look to fund to have, to make sure that we have, a full-time veteran liaison for HRA and for NYCHA. So, this way, we have real time information that, God forbid, if a veteran commit suicide at 2 o'clock in the morning, that person would be responsible to report it to DVS. If there is a vacant apartment, right? That veteran liaison should be reporting that to DVS and then it goes into your unit. So I think that this is part of

2 the problem that HRA and NYCHA does not have a full-  
3 time veteran liaison who focuses on veterans 24 hours  
4 a day seven days a week and reports this information.  
5 Because of their job is only to work on veteran  
6 issues for, maybe, five minutes a day, then that's  
7 really nothing and it's not fair for our veterans.  
8 So I'd like to ask you, Commissioner, to advocate  
9 with me and, maybe, do a joint letter to the Mayor  
10 that-- to hold administration accountable that,  
11 outside of DVS, they should have a full-time veteran  
12 liaison.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, let's--  
14 let's talk about that, Chair Deutsch. I think we  
15 share the same concern and passion for veterans. I  
16 won't commit to a letter at this point--

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] But--

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: but I would  
19 definitely like to--

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes. So, I mean--

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: continue the  
22 conversation.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: My staff is  
24 listening to the hearing right now and I could tell  
25 you that-- I could almost guarantee you that a



letter is being drafted right now as-- as they watch this hearing and I really have nothing to think about, honestly. You're probably-- Your hands are tied, as a Commissioner working for the Mayor, but my hands are not tied and I want-- I want to make sure that we have a veteran liaison. I don't think any person, whether veteran or nonveteran, well say no and agree that we should have a 24 hour veteran full-time position--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: who will advocate for our veterans. So when there is a vacant apartment, for example, that is reported right away.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And if it's not reported, then that veteran liaison right now doesn't work on veteran issues and is not reporting veteran issues properly, maybe he or she should sleep in the veteran shelter and have the veteran move into his apartment. We need to hold those veteran liaisons fully, fully accountable. When I go to-- When I go home, I sleep with my phone. It's next to my bed. I am a council member 24 hours a day.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay? Seven days a week. I have the Sabbath. My phone is still next to me. When an emergency comes in, I must respond. I'm a member of the Council 24/7. So I think that someone who is going to be a veteran liaison needs to be available, needs to report to DVS. I'm not asking for 24 hours a day, but it should definitely not be five minutes a day and then information needs to be reported-- Not needs to be. It must be reported in real time. So that is part of the lack of communication when it comes to a few points, whether it's a veteran who may have PTSD in housing that is not being reported to DVS or to the proper channels because his and her job is not full time or maybe it's a housing issue or vacancy issue or any other type of issues that have to do with these agencies that they know about or they may not know about because they are not focused on this.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, Chair Deutsch, what I will commit to is let's-- Let's have a roundtable. Let's bring the-- the stakeholders around the table and let's talk this through. But I think that would be an important next step that I

would be glad to participate in such a-- such a roundtable.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Who would be the stakeholders in this?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That's what I'd like do. Is I'd to consult with Assistant Commissioner Branca and we'll work with your office and propose what might be a good grouping to continue this conversation.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, the only issue I have is, as elected officials, the lack of response and timely response from the administration of the problem. I just put in the bill the other day in the city Council-- It's being drafted now.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: That would require New York City to have a task force. A task force to visit every single city agency and check the efficiency, check the response time, check the money ways, and check how they operate, making sure they have the right data is and computers and software's and the staff members have their jobs that they have titles for. That they are using those titles for

what they need to do. And then, put together a plan of how to correct it, not just report it.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But they should also correct it by bringing-- bringing in resources, bringing and advisers, and to revamp that agency to make sure that New York City, 8.6 million New Yorkers, 210,000 veterans, and receive not only the services that everyone deserves-- I'm not just talking about the veterans. I'm talking about all the agencies. But it should be done in a timely manner and in a responsive manner and just to move things. This is the city, that we call, that never sleeps.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Huh.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And whenever we go back-and-forth with administration on one issue, one of many, then we are just being pushed back. We are being pushed back. It takes me sometimes, and others, to three years to accomplish one thing. One of many things that we have to fight for because lack of communication and sometimes the agencies are busy-- Oh. We are busy with something else, but we'll get to your thing soon. It's all equally

important and we need to make sure that the agencies work with efficiency. So when it comes to sitting down with stakeholders, I could bet you right now, Commissioner, and everyone here, that this meeting will not happen this week because for serious about it, it should happen tomorrow and it should get done quick. The conversation should get on quick. Not two weeks, three weeks, five weeks, six months, year. We're going to be sitting here in 2020, maybe, discussing the same issues. We need to get things done. We need to see action and that is why this committee is about to have oversight to make sure that things are run properly. Commissioner, I think you are doing a great job and I want to work with you because I think sometimes-- I think there's a lot of loopholes here that we need to correct and this is one of many, for example, and we need to get this done. If you could set up the meeting with the administration, that would be great and I could report back to see what transpired from this stakeholders meeting. I think that no one would not agree with me saying that we need to have a full-time position in all these agencies who are advocating-- supposed to be advocating for the veterans and to

report everything in real time. In addition to that-- so that would take care of the operations part and the data part of DVS. In addition to that, then you have the media part because a lot of resources are there that has to do with reaching out to people and making sure people understand that these are the services that the veteran has. We need to make it as easy as possible for veterans to reach out to DVS to receive those services. How does your-- How do you work when it comes to media, Commissioner? When it comes to getting the message out, reaching out to as many veterans as possible, do you have a database of emails, phone numbers, addresses? How does the outreach work?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. We're pleased to have two full-time communications staff and I think I mentioned earlier in my testimony that we've got a digital manager that we are currently preparing to bring on board to make this a three-member team. The communications team organizes our high level speaking events. They connect with constituents at the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner level, at speaking events in all five boroughs including community discussions, keynote speeches,

mayoral events. Also they regularly engage with local reporters generating coverage about DVS in print media, television news broadcasts, and digital media outlets. I mentioned the podcast which--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]  
[inaudible 1:14:36] One second. I also want to do a look a little slowly because my head is spinning because it-- you're doing a lot over there. So let's talk about just-- I'm sorry. I'm not cutting you off. I just want to go one by one or maybe like three at a time. So your communications staff goes to all five boroughs. Is that different then the peer counselors? That's addition to the peer counselors, right?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That is an--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]  
Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: addition.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So you have five peer counselors. Are all five spots, slots-- Are all five spots taken? Are they occupied? Are they-- Do you have a peer counselor currently in all five boroughs?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Our veteran peer counselors work with our housing and support services team and they lead the veteran homelessness mission. Our engagement and community services specialists, they are the team that we have merged over the last six months and are currently cross training and preparing for a citywide strategy that combines both the whole health, as well as education and employment and veteran benefit counseling capability and that is the team that we currently have two openings that are posted.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. So now you have-- Do you have a peer counselor now and every borough? Is that job taken?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: The veteran peer counselors--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: They work wherever they need to.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I'm saying, is the--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: They do work in every--



CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: You have a title of peer counselor for each borough, right? So you have five peer counselors?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay. Perhaps it would make more sense, Chair, if we sit down and we can lay this out for you because it can be a little confusing. The veteran peer coordinators, they go where the homeless veterans are and where the housing stock is, which is in all five boroughs. But our other, our ECSC, the engagement and community service coordinators, they're the specialists who man the Veteran Resource Centers which are located, one in each borough and they are also the ones who to all of the community outreach for all issues other than homelessness across the city.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you have an office in each borough, right? For the peer coordinator?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: For the engagement and community services specialists. The veteran peer coordinators, they were in a number of places, as do our ECS specialists, but they work in the shelters, they work with landlords, they work in apartments.

They work all over the city and I mentioned that we are in the midst of a 90 days strategy task force--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: that will prepare our engagement and community services specialist that are--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Got it. Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: our new and improved outreach team that mans our Veteran Resource Centers, one in each borough.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. So you have a satellite office in each borough?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And each one is staffed by one person, right? Are all those five positions taken?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So we currently have two positions that are open. They're...

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]  
Okay. So which--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: posted.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Which borough is that?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No. We cover all of the boroughs. We are covering all of the boroughs with our team as it stands.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] No.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We are also hiring two additional individuals, but we--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Uh--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: are covering all of the veteran resource satellite office hours in each borough today.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So you have someone in each--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: In each borough? It stayed that way? The same person that is there now is staying that the satellite office are you are moving around? Or are you going to be switching it around?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, it varies. I mean, right now, we have a reduced number of specialists, so they are having to double team, but they work together and collaborate across borough lines. So they are covering the basis, but we also

2 look forward to bringing on board the two additional  
3 specialists which are currently posted.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I just don't  
5 understand something. So in each borough you have a  
6 satellite office, right?

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So you always have  
9 someone at the satellite office?

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No. We don't have  
11 someone there full time. We have posted office--

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]  
13 Part--

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: hours.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Posted office  
16 hours. You have someone there for the posted office  
17 hours. So why isn't that person who is there for the  
18 posted office hours, why is that the same person  
19 every day so that that person could understand that  
20 community--

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: know what meetings  
23 to go to. Community board meetings, police and  
24 Council meetings--

25 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: civic meetings. So why is it being-- why are people being moved around than--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We have two vacant positions right now, Chair Deutsch.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So that's what I'm trying to figure out. So--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So what we do is we work to preserve continuity just for the reasons that you mentioned, but when we have two empty positions, we have to cover all five boroughs with a reduced number of folks, but as soon as we get those positions filled, then we will have consistency and continuity on a per borough basis and we look forward to that.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Are the hours-- Like how does all five get covered for the posted hours when it's more or less the same hours?  
[inaudible 1:20:04]

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. So, they hours are posted on our website and individuals can walk in. They can also call our front desk and we then coordinate to make sure that every veteran who

reaches out and wants to get assistance, gets that assistance.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. My question is that if you have, let's say, posted hours. Let say from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. at each site and all five boroughs and you have three people that are covering five boroughs, right? So is they are all have the same hours, how is it possible for all--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] So it's--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: five to be covered?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No. It's not Monday through Friday. So, on average, satellite offices have posted hours for 10 to 12 hours a week and a total number of 20 hours doing community outreach in the borough that include the satellite hours. So, they are staggered throughout the week. It's not every day of the week. And so we'll be able to send you the lay down on this, if you want a more detailed look, but--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: we are absolutely committed to ensuring that our veterans do not have

to cross a river or bridge to get the help that they have earned.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, what are the Brooklyn hours and what days are the Brooklyn hours? Does anyone have that information?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. So the Brooklyn hours-- This is at the Workforce 1 Center at 9 Bond Street and it's Monday and Wednesday 10 to 12 and-- Is it 1 to 3? 10 to 12 and 1 to 4.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And Wednesday is also 10 to 12?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Pardon me?

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Monday and Wednesday from 10 A.M. to 12 P.M.?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Monday and Wednesdays from 10 to noon and from 1 to 4 P.M.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: in Brooklyn.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And from 1 to 4.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And then Manhattan?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: In Manhattan, we've got Monday and Friday 10 to noon, 1 to 4 P.M.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And in Staten  
3 Island?

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So, we'll put a  
5 matrix together for you, Chair Deutsch. We'll be  
6 happy to do--

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] No.  
8 You don't-- Yeah. Maybe your staff could just read  
9 off the morning hours I just want to know.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So it's 10--

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So Bronx--

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 10 to 12.

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I mean, we can just  
15 give-- [background comments] Mr. Chair, we'll just  
16 give you this--

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: hand out that has  
19 all of the hours.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Great.

21 Okay.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: That's perfect.

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And then you'll  
25 have it for all five of boroughs.



CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes. I'll--

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Abs--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. Here  
you go.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I didn't know you  
have something printed.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Sorry,  
Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And that's  
something that we hand out regularly throughout the  
city at our community outreach events and in the  
offices, as well as the resource centers.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Okay. So I  
think we can wrap up for today and we can hear  
testimony from some of the advocates. So,  
Commissioner, thanks. Once again, I'd like to thank  
you for being here and we started late today. We  
have a new room. Usually it's on 16th floor on 250  
Broadway. Maybe if we get a larger crowd, we'll go  
into Chambers [laughter] next time.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We'll get the big  
time, huh, Chair Deutsch?

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I just want to  
3 thank you, Commissioner, for being here today and  
4 also for the very extremely responsive in the  
5 previous hearings and I'm looking forward to working  
6 with you, Commissioner, to making sure that we  
7 streamline and get the veterans the services and  
8 resources and the knowledge-- that we should all  
9 have the knowledge of what's going on throughout the  
10 city and-- regarding different services that there  
11 are. That there are there for veterans. And I'm  
12 also looking forward to the mental health first-aid  
13 trainings--

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: That we're setting  
16 up with Thrive NYC.

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Terrific.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So thank you very  
19 much. Thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you very  
21 much, Chair Deutsch.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: All right. For our  
23 first panel-- Well, first of all, I want to thank  
24 all the advocates for being here today. First panel,  
25 Maria Hunter, Coco, Cathy Cramer, and Dao Sun (sp?).

[background comments] Thank you very much. We'll go clockwise, so we're going to-- We're putting everyone on a three minute clock so you don't have to get into your whole testimony if it's smaller than that. So, just try to get to the main points and try to stick to the three minutes, please. So, we'll go clockwise. We'll start with Coco.

COCO CULHANE: Good afternoon. Coco Culhane. I'm the founder and director of the Veteran Advocacy Project. Usually, when we appear and testify, we are talking about a bill or some pressing issue, so I thought I would actually take some time to tell you what we do, aside from that. So we do general legal services and specialize in veterans law. And I'm just going to tell you about some of our initiatives. So, we are partnered with the Jericho Project and services for the underserved and we work with them on a Supportive Services for Veterans Family grant, focusing on legal representation for housing and wraparound services to promote housing stability. We also have two medical legal partnerships with the number of sites with two entities. So, one is with the Department of Veterans Affairs and we're in three VA centers once a week and

that they are in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. We also partner with their counselors and they provide medical evidence for our cases for clients so that our attorneys are working closely with the counselors they are. And then, as you know, our other medical legal partnership is with the community health care network and they will be speaking about that. But we are so fortunate because we can provide this resource to our clients who may not be eligible or, some of the older vets particular, don't want to use the VA and CHN has pediatrics, women's care, everything that our clients and their families need. So that's been a great resource. And then what else? We just launched a justice involved outreach and we are working with the VA's veterans just is outreach office and we are going to treatment courts and to four different units at Rikers and working on doing some preventative-- We see a lot of vets that get massive overpayments because they didn't know that they were supposed to report their incarceration to the VA or they didn't know that they could actually have those benefits apportioned to their family while they are in jail. So we were seeing spouses, you know, being evicted and all sorts of hardships. So

we thought, if we could address this upstream and actually do the outreach and help veterans on that side. And then our latest initiative, you know, we-- It wouldn't be a VAP testimony unless I brought up less than honorable discharges. And so, you know, we had done one outreach, one flyer back in August 2013 and we have never done any other outreach. I mean, we speak and inform people about it, but what is been really weighing on all of us is that there are a lot of LGBTQ veterans who are, you know, getting older and are going to lose their chance to actually correct their record to get their discharge upgrade. So we are going to-- We are seeking support to fund that an expanded and were going to be partnering with SAGE vets and hopefully addressing that issue. Then we have our discharge upgrade clinic with the pro bono partners and talk about bad all the time. So--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very much. We are going to have like a roundtable before the budget, so--

COCO CULHANE: And I just--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [background comments]

COCO CULHANE: If I could add one thing?

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Well, if you stop now, you get an extra snack when you come to my office. If you want to continue, you're not getting that candy.

COCO CULHANE: Well, I got-- All right. I'm going to give up this back because I think this is really important. I just want to say that I really think the veterans initiative should be prioritizing veterans law. You know housing is crucial. There is nothing more-- Right? Like housing court representation is absolutely vital, but there are massive funds in the city for general legal services and veterans need those services and use them. This is the chance to, you know-- There's just not enough lawyers doing veterans law, so we hope that you will prioritize that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Understood. Yes.

COCO CULHANE: No snack.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We're going to see if we could raise the initiatives. Thank you. Thank you, Coco.

DAO SUN: Good afternoon. My name is Dao Sun. I am a senior staff attorney with the Veterans Justice Project and Manhattan Legal Services, which is part of Legal Services NYC. Legal Service NYC is one of the largest providers of free civil legal services in the nation with offices in all five boroughs. We serve over 100,000 New Yorkers annually. Lesley created VJP to help low income veterans, active-duty service members, and their family members to navigate the complex world of housing law, public benefits, family law, consumer law, Social Security, and other essential needs. Many low income veterans face civil legal problems cannot afford and attorney, yet they are at a severe disadvantage without one. Our work-- Our project works to ensure that veterans receive the benefit of free legal counsel while tackling complicated civil legal matters. Lesley's Veterans Justice Project help more than 13,000 New York veterans and their family members annually. We do this by creating numerous access points and partnerships through which veterans can learn about our services and receive our services. We have established and operate a citywide

veterans hotline. We created numerous legal clinics throughout the city to train pro bono attorneys--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [inaudible 1:32:25]

DAO SUN: to assist with veterans.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I got it.

DAO SUN: We operate several intake sites--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

DAO SUN: creating and maintaining a veterans justice clinic at New York Law School, forging new partnerships and receiving referrals from more than 42 public and not-for-profit organizations that serve veterans. One example of the work that we do is that we assist an elderly, disabled veteran who was denied social security benefits and 2013 when he did not have an attorney. This veteran, 62 years old, suffers from a multitude of impairments including PTSD and cancer. In 2015, we helped him complete another application for Social Security benefits. The initial application was denied and then we represented him at the administrative hearing. His application was finally approved in 2018 and now he has an additional 1200 dollars a month in Social Security benefits and he was awarded



retroactive benefits of 52,000 dollars. So this makes a tremendous difference in the disabled veterans life. Our veterans should not have to face the rationing of free civil legal services. They have sacrificed for all of us. We have a duty to ensure that veterans services-- that veterans receive the benefits that they deserve and they have free and safe and affordable housing.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. If you want to wave your snack, you can continue. No. I'm kidding. [laughter] Thank you very much.

MARIA HUNTER: Chair Deutsch, council members, and staff, good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is your mic-- Is your mic-- I think you turned your mic. Just push the button. Yeah.

MARIA HUNTER: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the veterans committee about the fiscal year 20 budget. My name is Maria Hunter and I am the director of public benefits at the New York Legal Assistance Group. I am also joined by my colleague, Ryan Foley, who is the coordinating attorney of the veterans practice. The New York Legal Assistance Group uses the power of

the law to help New Yorkers in need, back social and economic justice. For veterans who seek to increase their veterans benefits, having an attorney is crucial. Eligibility for different benefits varies and is predicated on a variety of factors and the VA requires anyone who aids in preparing, submitting, and appealing a VA claim be accredited by the VA. The 2017 annual report of the Board of Veterans Appeals, BVA, shows appeals brought by attorneys had a success rate that was 10 percent higher than those-- then all other representatives and advocacy groups, combined on average. In fiscal year 17, some 81 percent of appeal claims with attorneys were either approved or amended and claim appeals with attorneys also had the lowest denial rate at only 14 percent. Even the federal courts acknowledge the difference when veterans are represented by counsel. Moreover, these statistics show that a veterans best chance at winning on appeal is to have an attorney as his or her representative. Attorneys are accustomed to analyzing complex laws and regulations, understanding complicated policies, and navigating the various bureaucracies that are keeping their clients from obtaining the benefits they need. NYLAS

serves hundreds of New York City veterans each year through its medical legal partnerships at the Bronx Manhattan VA and through its community-based veterans practice, which is funded by the city Council's legal services for veterans initiative. NYLAS aims to provide comprehensive services and we have served more than 350 veterans through the legal services for veterans initiative in just the first eight months of the current fiscal year. While many veterans come to us to assist in obtaining the benefits to which their service entitles them, we often find, through our screening process, that they have additional legal needs such as housing, consumer debt, and advanced planning. The NYLAS veterans practice provides assistance with all these areas of the law and is also able to refer to other matters in areas such as immigration and family law to attorneys within NYLA. The ability to fully service clients in-house is especially crucial for veterans who often suffer from mental health issues such as posttraumatic stress disorder, which can be exacerbated when they are asked to tell their stories to multiple organizations and that may deter them from seeking out other services that they need.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. I have a question. So when a veteran comes in, a veteran that has PTSD, so do they come in with like a doctor's clinical report or they come inside and they tell you that, oh, I have PTSD. Like how does that work?

MARIA HUNTER: So, there's a couple different ways the veterans come to us. If they are calling our main line, sometimes they're just calling us to find out, well, what am I eligible for? So we screen them and when we are talking about service-connected to disability, we would talk about the conditions that are causing their disability and that might lead us to discuss their PTSD. But then we would help them obtain that medical documentation. We would reach out to their providers who would gather VA records. So that can be an investigative process. Sometimes the clients come to us because they are already seeking treatment and name might have been referred by their social worker at the hospital, for example.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Thank you.

CATHY CRAMER: Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Kramer and I am the CEO of Legal Information

for Families Today which is known as LIFT, but we are not the car service. LIFT was launched in 1996 when three women law students have the simple, but revolutionary, idea of establishing a go to location in New York City family courts that would provide on the spot legal help for unrepresented parents struggling to make their way through the courts on civil legal issues. These issues were typically related to child support, custody, visitation, domestic violence, and guardianship. Today we now serve over 30,000 families a year and we have the following core programs:

We have education and information sites and all the five family courts throughout the city where we distribute one of our 38 original multilingual legal resource guides that cover a wide range of family law issues on a fifth grade reading level. We have family law information help lines which are accessible by telephone, email, and live chat and we receive approximately 14,000 calls a year. We have court consultations in the family courts where we provide in-depth consultation and enable unrepresented litigants to meet privately with a staff attorney and receive vital legal advice and

counsel. And then we have a legal education and outreach program where we provide education workshops on family law and legal clinics out in the community where litigants don't have to come to court, but we meet them where they live. Thanks to funding by counsel member Deutsch and the New York City Council in 2019, we are now able to target our legal resource information resources and limited scope of representation services to both active military and returning veteran parents in New York City. We are in the process of creating two new legal resource guides. Our easy to read multilingual guides, one for active military members, and one for returning veterans who were transitioning out of the military. These guides will cover a variety of issues relevant to active duty military and is transitioning such as how can veterans navigate the military child-support requirement and then transition to the civil child support requirements when they come home? How can they make child-support modifications based on their change of employment when they are no longer in the military? How does custody and visitation modifications based on change of living circumstances work? How do VA benefits intersect with child-

support payments? What's the intersection between retirement benefits from the military and child support calculations? We are working with a number of veterans groups to assure that we address the most pertinent issues in our guides. These include the New York City Bar Veterans Assistance Project, American Corporate Partners. And once our guides are finished in May, we hope to disseminate them in consultation with these partners out in the community so we can get the word out as quickly and as efficiently as possible. Thank you so much for your support and we look forward to working with you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Cathy. And thank you for coming down and testifying. You can stay all day, if you want.

CATHY CRAMER: Huh.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Well, it's already the end of the day. Our next panel. Kelly Sabatino, Samuel, come on down. Kathleen Stryhal and James Hendon. How many more?

SAMUEL MOLIK: How are you? Somebody missed the meeting.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We'll go clockwise. Yes. You go first.

JAMES HENDON: We're together. So--

KATHLEEN STRYHAL: Yeah. We're actually together.

JAMES HENDON: Let's switch seats.

KELLY SABATINO: You want to switch?

JAMES HENDON: Let's switch seats.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, okay.

JAMES HENDON: [inaudible 1:42:49]

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: You want to talk in the same time?

KATHLEEN STRYHAL: Oh. Oh. Sorry.

JAMES HENDON: No. It's okay. It's okay.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. You're the same speech?

JAMES HENDON: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

KATHLEEN STRYHAL: All right.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So we'll go this way.

KATHLEEN STRYHAL: Okay. Good afternoon.

Thank you, Chairperson Deutsch and members of the Committee on Veterans for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kelly Sabatino and I am the public



policy manager at Community Healthcare Network, also known as CHN. CHN is a network of 14 federally qualified health centers including two school-based health centers and a fleet of medical mobile vans. We provide affordable primary care, behavioral health, dental, and supportive services to 85,000 New Yorkers annually throughout Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. As part of our mission to meet the needs of all New Yorkers, CHN launched the Military Health and Wellness Family program in 2017 to provide comprehensive health and social services to military populations throughout New York City. The program directly helps meet the need for timely, culturally informed, and integrated healthcare among active duty service members, veterans, and military affiliated family members regardless of military discharge status. Since July 2017, we have engaged over 500 military affiliated patients inside and outside this program. Through our medical legal partnership with the Urban Justice Center is a Veteran Advocacy Project, or also known as VAP, CHN offers primary and behavioral healthcare and legal and social services to military populations. Individuals are referred to the program through VAP,

Vet Connect NYC, numerous veterans assistance organizations or internal staff are paired with a member of our social work team, screened using an intake form specially designed for military affiliated populations, and provided with the care that they need. One student 2017 within an integrative grant from the New York community trust, both CHN and VAP were able to substantially expand the program in 2018 with funding supplied by the New York City Council's Veterans Mental Health Initiative. With counsel support, we have also been able to expand the number of centers of excellence in military care offered at our health centers. Staff at these centers are trained by the Veteran Advocacy Project to provide comprehensive, culturally informed care to military populations. We now have for military health centers of excellence at our Harlem, Long Island city, Sutphin Boulevard, and South Bronx health centers. Moving forward, we plan to designate two more health centers in Williamsburg and Tremont as military centers of excellence and significantly expand the number of patients we serve through the Military Health and Family Wellness program. As part of this effort, we plan to bring our integrative

health van to new locations throughout the city and explore opportunities for expanding trauma informed dental services for veterans that are health centers. We also plan to host a military families health and wellness panel in mid-to-late 2019 addressing best practices, challenges, and experiences serving and receiving care among military affiliated populations. We think the Chairman and the Committee on Veterans for their generous support on this project and initiative and look forward to continuing our work alongside the city Council to better serve military populations throughout New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. I just have two questions.

KELLY SABATINO: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: If you don't have it now, you don't have to give it. If you have, how many calls do you-- How many referrals do you see from Vet Connect?

KELLY SABATINO: I can tell you that--

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Like 2018.

KELLY SABATINO: So, I have the data for beginning in year two which is when we started receiving City Council funding. Vet connect, about

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS 100  
2 11 percent of our referrals come through there. So,  
3 that--  
4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 11 percent. What--  
5 KELLY SABATINO: 11 percent is 15  
6 patients.  
7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How many?  
8 KELLY SABATINO: 15 patients.  
9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 15. Okay.  
10 KELLY SABATINO: The majority of our  
11 referrals come through internal staff, such as our  
12 social work team. They identify patient and then  
13 they refer them to this program.  
14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, how do you  
15 receive information from Vet Connect?  
16 KELLY SABATINO: We have a referral  
17 department and they get that information that comes  
18 in.  
19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh. So they go on  
20 Vet Connect and they call you directly and they let  
21 you know, oh, we got-- I got to your information from  
22 Vet Connect. Okay. And you receive directly funding  
23 from-- from Thrive?  
24 KELLY SABATINO: Yes. I'm sorry, what?  
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: From Thrive? From  
3 the Thrive NYC. Do you receive direct--

4 KELLY SABATINO: [interposing] Oh. No.  
5 No. No. We received it through the city's Veterans  
6 Mental Health Initiative. The expense funding.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, okay.

8 KELLY SABATINO: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But nothing--  
10 Okay.

11 KELLY SABATINO: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Got it. Okay. All  
13 right. Thank you very much.

14 KELLY SABATINO: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, James, are you  
16 going to s-- You're going to testif-- You're going  
17 to speak?

18 JAMES HENDON: So, I-- We're going  
19 to--

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: This guy's got  
21 the--

22 JAMES HENDON: [inaudible 1:47:27]

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: This guy has got  
24 the best smile. You've got the best smile.

25

JAMES HENDON: We're going to both share the three minutes.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, okay.

JAMES HENDON: Yeah. All right. So, no. Good afternoon, Chair. My name is James Hendon. I'm director of the Veterans Future Lab. I'm also accompanied by Kate Stryhal, our Deputy Director and Community Manager in the space. You know, we both sit here before you as veterans and we say thank you for all the work you're doing on behalf of the veterans of New York City, first and foremost. I'm going to defer to Kate in a minute, but first, I want to take a minute about the VFL. Veterans Future Lab is an NYU-led incubator for aspiring and practicing entrepreneurs who are spouses of veterans or who themselves are veterans. We're the result of a public, private, and academic partnership. What makes us unique is that we are high touch. If you come into our space, we are going to work with you in person to help you help yourself get your venture to a better place and a fact about us is, for our current incubator class, we have 20 veteran run ventures. Those ventures have created 19 jobs, have earned 450,000 dollars in revenue over a one-year

period, and have raised over 2.3 million dollars over that one year period. So, we're doing a great job of teaching aspiring veterans about the entrepreneurship. We're doing a great job of supporting existing veteran ventures. We want to go a step further and incubate ventures from cradle to maturity or from ideation to operations and tackle an underserved segment in what, by itself, is an underserved segment. So, that said, I'll defer the rest of my time to Kate.

KATHLEEN STRYHAL: So, thank you, again, so much for your time. I know it's been a long one for you all. And thank you to James for the introduction. Through the FVBC program, we wish to create and print a captain it's already been well identified which is male owned businesses versus female owned businesses in the amount of. So, when a veteran is leaving the service, 12 percent of the men leaving service are going to go on to create their own business venture, while only five percent of female veterans leaving service will go on to create their own business venture. And through the FVBC, what we wish to do is identify the obstacles and challenges associated with female entrepreneurship in

general and break them down. If we can't break them down, at least jump over or walk around those challenges in order to create more diversity within our veteran community and also within our entrepreneurship community. We want to do so by, not only providing hands-on touch, by helping them with resources. So, if you have an idea, we are going to help you take that idea into a tangible, viable product. We're going to offer you legal assistance. We are going to help you with market fit. Creating a website. Making sure you know what steps to take, how to take them, and, also, making sure that they are in a community that is safe for them, that is surrounded by others like them, and making sure that we are just creating an environment and space that's for [inaudible 1:50:35] veterans.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great. Thank you.

To work with SBS?

JAMES HENDON: So, we work alongside SBS. So, we know that we-- Sofia Mussen (sp?), who runs their program Fast Track for Veterans, she's referred folks who come through that program to us and we've assisted and we've also used the material they have as far as the Kauffman Fast Track material.



We use that in our current vet class, Chairman. So, yes. We work alongside them very closely.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great. Excellent. That's--

JAMES HENDON: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: what the-- All right. Thank you. Thanks.

SAMUEL MOLIK: All right. Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Deutsch and Nick Hindy (sp?) for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Samuel Molik and I am the Director of Policy and Legislative Advocacy for the New York City Veterans Alliance. Member-driven and grassroots policy advocacy unique building organization that advances veterans and their family members as civic leaders and presenting testimony on behalf of our members are active stakeholders in this advocacy and some of them are actually sitting here in this room and at this table with me. The New York City Veterans Alliance is a key advocacy voice in the creation and the Department of Veterans Services as an independent agency. And we have been the premier community voice advocating to grow DVS' budget to the current 5.2 million dollars allotted for fiscal year 2020.

Membership strongly supports our continued work to set high expectations for the roll of DVS in New York City and beyond. And there is much to be optimistic about as DVS continues to build a staff of impressive professionals and continue its impactful work like tracking and coordination of care and permanent housing for homeless veterans. But there is still much work to be done, as has been noted in this hearing earlier. Therefore, we make the following recommendations for DVS' fiscal year 2020 budget. At the outset, we regret to say that DVS' budget reduced for the upcoming fiscal year. We have observed the mayor's budget proposal for DVS reflects an overall reduction of 63,238 dollars to a total budget of 5.2 and 23 and some change. While the mayor has proposed larger budget cuts for DVS in recent past, we remain firmly opposed to a reduction in the budget of this new agency that we fought hard to create and has yet to fully scale into a robust and seamless and results oriented services for veterans and their families across all five boroughs. If we consider the cities approximately 220,000 veterans and an estimated 250,000 spouses and household dependents who rely upon them, that is roughly one in every 17 New

Yorkers who are impacted by veterans services. In the Mayor's fiscal year 2020 budget of 92.2 billion dollars, the proportional share of the city's funds we might expect to be targeted at veterans and their families would roughly be 5.4 billion. The current budget for DVS is less than a tenth of that amount. New York City's budget must not be balanced on the back of veterans and their families. A population that has been underserved for decades by our cities government and that DVS is only begun to reach out over the past few years. And, unlike many other agencies, TVS brings a clear return for the investment made. When veterans and their families are able to access more of the federal and state benefits and services that they have earned, it reduces the cost of city services for this population and it also brings federal funding into those communities that need it the most. As it continues to build agency, infrastructure, and refine its mission and outreach, DVS has the potential to bring in a substantial return on the city's investment. Respect to DVS' staffing, we are pleased to see the inclusion of an HR Generalist. This is an important step and we look forward to the important work that

that HR Generalist will undertake. What is not included in this staffing proposal is an Agency Chief Contracting Officer. As we've stated in previous testimonies before the veterans committee and discussions with the chairman, we strongly urge the council to allocate funding in DVS' budget for a dedicated ACCO with a specialized expertise in the cities contracting and procurement processes. We believe DVS would be enhanced by an ACCO with the right expertise, relationships, and sense of urgency for veteran priorities. Delays that have taken place over the last three years in bringing Vet Connect NYC under DVS management would have likely been mitigated by in-house contracting and procurement expertise. An ACCO would also bring the capability of providing meaningful oversight of discretionary funding from the Council to organizations serving veterans based on their experience and knowledge of the veterans community. We ask the committee will you advocate for inclusion of an ACCO in DVS' budget? We also continue to call for more effective transparent metrics for success in DVS' programming as it is been stated and alluded to in the previous testimony and hearing. For example, veterans pay-- An employment

Pay for Success program should have been more robust metrics attached to it. The amount projected in fiscal year 2019 for the VA orchestrated program, purposes of social impact investment [inaudible 1:55:48] for New York City with payment by New York City for employment outcomes for veterans with PTSD. We appreciate the innovative program, but we urge the community to ensure that the company is accompanied by robust metrics for success prior to any further funding. The DVS agencies staff and programming are supported by New York City taxpayers. We believe there should be transparency in the form of more effective, qualitative data reporting and we strongly urge this committee to call for DVS to focus on enhanced data refining and more cost-effective delivery of information and services for veterans in the broader taxpaying public. We also ask that the information about the programmatic work being done by DVS in conjunction with funds raised under the mayor's funds are advancing New York City be made for public review. While not part of the city's budget, we realize DVS has been utilizing philanthropic funds for veterans programming through the mayor's fund. Veterans are not mentioned in last year's annual

report for the mayor's fund and we are interested in how we might learn more about the funding and how the city is utilizing it for benefit of veterans. We believe this would help create a further picture of DVS' programming in impacts as a city agency and build trust with the community it serves. We look forward to continued dialogue and partnership with DVS as it continues to grow and work towards serving New York City veterans community. On behalf of the New York City Veterans Alliance, thank you for the opportunity to testify. Pending any questions, this ends my testimony.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very much. Thanks. And received. We will work on some of these things and regarding an ACCO, let's work together. Let's see what we can do.

SAMUEL MOLIK: Great. I look forward to it.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I see you had--

SAMUEL MOLIK: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I see you had a question, so I just wanted to answer your question.

SAMUEL MOLIK: I appreciate it. Thank you very much, Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very much. Thanks. Jody Rudin, Robert Wadiack, Lisa Carling, and Nicole Cicogna. By raise of hands, names and I mispronounced? Okay. Sorry. We will go clockwise.

LISA CARLING: Ready to go? I'm Lisa Carling. I'm director of TDF Accessibility Programs. And thank you for this opportunity. TDF is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to bringing the power of the performing arts to everyone. This includes our cities veterans, too many of whom are missing from our audiences. In 2017, we created, with the city Council's support, the TDF theatergoing program. The program provides tickets at no cost to New York City's former servicemen and women of all ages who have served in any branch of the armed forces and reside and one of the five boroughs. Included with any parent of tickets is an invitation to enroll in a one-year complementary TDF membership that gives each of them the opportunity to purchase tickets for additional shows at greatly reduced cost. We partners with 25 different veterans groups this year, 16 of which were new, to distribute tickets to events and substance abuse programs, shelters,

transitional housing, educational programs, city organizations, community social and support groups. We have offered a total of 1200 complementary tickets to 12 different Broadway shows this season for veterans and their companions. In the Disney show pre-curtain announcements, they acknowledge the veterans, the TDF program, and city Council funding, all of which brings spontaneous applause and cheers from the whole audience. We have also been able to schedule a brief talk box with cast members after most of the performances, which the vets have enjoyed. To enhance the experience, several of our partners have put together pre-performances in. The most memorable for me was Wounded Warrior Project hosting a dinner at Dallas Barbeque beforehand for veterans and their children who were going to Frozen on January 29. Sandy Kenyan from channel 7 Eyewitness News was there, interviewed them, and did a great piece on it. The physical or invisible wounds, the simple principle of our program is that we believe that going to the theater's healing. It gives veterans a chance to come together as a community, engage with each other, feel appreciated, and enjoy a live theater experience. We are grateful



to the New York City Council with a special thanks to Chair Deutsch for funding this program for a second year and we hope you will continue your support for the healing power of the performing arts. I would love-- Now like to introduce Bobby Wadiack who is a veteran from Samaritan village.

ROBERT WADIACK: Good afternoon, Chair Deutsch. I'm a United States Navy veteran from Samaritan day-- Village Veterans Program. I, along with other veterans in this program, have been a beneficiary of the theater tickets provided by TDF's veterans theatergoing program. Among these plays, ways Donna Summer, the musical, The Play that Goes Wrong, Miss Saigon, and Kinky Boots. The reason I'm here today is to stress the importance of this program to us veterans. Ours is a program that has members of all five branches of the military. Among us, we have a Marine who was in a Beirut Marine barracks bombing, we have soldiers and sailors who served in Desert Storm, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. These plays that we have had the privilege of attending have been instrumental in interacting-- I mean, denigrating us back into society and have provided much-needed stress relief. And I know I am

not just speaking for myself when I say that all of us appreciate the feeling that we got we are-- when we are thanked with our services with more than mere words. In closing, I would like one more time to stress the importance of this program and the services that provides to the men and women who've selflessly defended our freedom. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Robert. And I had the honor of attending some of those programs with TDF and it's really-- Thank you for the great work you are doing for the veterans and, Robert, thank you for coming here today. It means a lot, so thank you very much.

JODY RUDIN: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Chair Deutsch and council staff. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Jody Rudin and I am the Chief Operating Officer at Project Renewal, a New York City Homeless Services organization. For more than 52 years, project renewal has empowered individuals and families who are homeless or at risk to renew their lives through health, home, and jobs. Each year, we served nearly 15,000 New Yorkers, including hundreds of veterans. We are grateful to you, Chair Deutsch,

and the city Council forgiving project renewal 300,000 dollars for homeless prevention services for veterans. Support that has been crucial for us to help veterans across all of our programs. Your funding has allowed us to improve assessments and tracking of our veterans clients which is enabling us to serve them even better now. So far, in fiscal year 19, we have provided health care to almost 220 veterans in our mobile medical vans and sheltered bays clinics and through our psychiatry and substance use disorder programs. Veterans use our healthcare programs at a higher rate than our nonveteran clients. Their needs are complex and require coordinating services with many different organizations. As a result, their care is more expensive. These are men and women that have served our country. We owe it to them to take care of them. I think the Council for recognizing us and supporting our work. Additionally, our employment programs, which have been recognized nationally, help veterans obtain and keep career path jobs and our next step program provides job training, internship placements, interview coaching, and retention support in our award-winning culinary arts training program places

80 percent of graduates in jobs. Nearly twice the national average for similar programs. Both programs have helped veterans. One of our clients, Herbert, grew up in Queens and served in the U.S. Army. Herbert was also formerly incarcerated. In 2015 he became homeless. Herbert participated in our culinary training program and, when he graduated, he got a job as a cook. Thanks to this job, Herbert was able to move into his own apartment in Rosedale, Queens. No veteran should be homeless. We are proud that our permanent and transitional housing programs currently provide apartments for 50 veterans. Moving forward, we want to deepen our expertise working with veterans. We have an opportunity to enhance our services and provide more training to our staff so they can be more effective in working with our veteran population. We also want to collaborate with the VA healthcare system to improve continuity of care for homeless and at risk veterans so we can better address their unique needs. The City Council played a vital role in helping to reduce veterans homelessness. This tremendous progress has been possible because of the city's concerted investment

and the work of nonprofit agencies it supports.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Jody.

Thank you.

NICOLE CICOGNA: Hi. Thank you to Chair Deutsch and the City Council and the Veterans Committee for allowing me to be here today to testify in support of program funding for New York City's veteran population. My name is Nicole Cicogna and I am the Executive Director of GallopNYC. We provide therapeutic horsemanship programs for our children and adults with disabilities, including risk youth and veterans in New York City. Horsemanship includes horseback riding, groundwork, and horse care and our mission is to help rioters in New York City with disabilities walk, talk, and learn, inspiring them to live their lives as fully, independently, and productively as possible. At the height of our season, we provide lessons to 686 individuals per week and we operate our programs at four locations across the boroughs and we are committed to serving low and middle income families, the majority of whom received tuition scholarships. We have offered a veteran program for nearly 11 years now open to all

New York City veterans at no charge to them. Council member Deutsch, Speaker Johnson, and the entire city Council, with your generous support and that of the committee and the Veterans Initiative, we received funding this year for our growing veterans program. And funds are being used to support the free therapeutic horseback riding and groundwork program for veterans in Queens at our GallopNYC Forest Hills and GallopNYC Sunrise Stables in Howard Beach. Therapeutic horsemanship is effective with veterans in both physical and emotional rehabilitation including for posttraumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and those with brain injuries. Our therapeutic horsemanship programs for veterans focuses on the interaction with horses and helps improve skills and decisions-- decision-making and self-regulation. Effective horsemanship requires leadership and, as one can imagine, many veterans respond well to opportunities to be leaders. It also helps veterans with PTSD get in touch with their emotions. Many veterans experience a hyper vigilant state when they return and it doesn't subside after they return home from military service and it is often the result of PTSD. Consequentially, many veterans struggle with

being able to relax and make vital connections with other people and structured time with horses can be very helpful with veterans overcoming the tendency to be hyper vigilant and they learned to reacts in the moment when they are around the horses. I know I do. We offer programming to veterans twice each week at our locations in Queens and the outdoor environment at our five acre park site at Sunrise Stables provides a natural healing and a stress relieving setting. And with your support and your continued support this fiscal year, our therapeutic program can continue to be offered at veterans at no cost to them. So thank you for your generosity to GallopNYC and the generosity to the veterans of New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Nicole, and that was great when I was visiting GallopNYC. It was really nice.

NICOLE CICOGNA: Yes. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And the work you do and watching the veterans first hand having that relationship. I think I met Charlie, the horse, right?

NICOLE CICOGNA: You did. My favorite.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Charlie--

NICOLE CICOGNA: Charlie.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: likes me. Yeah.

All right. Great. Thank you so much.

NICOLE CICOGNA: Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Courtney Orr, Tom Webber, Rhonda Sherwin. You can begin.

Okay. Good to see you again. Hello and thank you, council member Deutsch and the Committee on Veterans for allowing me to testify today. My name is Courtney Orr and I am the Director of Individual Engagement at Row New York. I am here to testify on behalf of Row New York's veterans programs. Through the discipline of rowing, Row New York transformed the lives of New Yorkers regardless of background or ability. Across our three program sites, we served 270 middle and high school students from low income neighborhoods, 1500 teens in public schools, and over 200 individuals with cognitive and physical disabilities, including our veterans program. Row New York's veteran-- Veterans rowing program provides New York City veterans with opportunities to experience the sport of rowing. The program is designed to help veterans afford-- avoid



poor health outcomes such as obesity and depression by improving their physical fitness, including strength, speed, endurance, and mobility. Veterans also benefit from the opportunity to compete on a team, belong to a supportive community, and experience New York City's waterways. Rowing can be easily adapted to meet different ability levels, making the sport you neatly suited to parent athletes. Individuals with visual impairments, physical disabilities, and/or cognitive disabilities can all excel as rowers. In the past, our adaptive programs have served veterans with a wide range of cognitive and physical disabilities. Including, but not limited to, amputations, multiple sclerosis, blindness, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Our veterans rowing program has three activities: Our recreational program, competitive payer program, and indoor VA program.

In our recreational program, participants learn the fundamentals of rowing and physical fitness both on the water and indoor rowing machines.

Our competitive payer program means three times a week to practice for competitive races, which they participate in throughout the year.

Lastly, we have our indoor VA program through partnerships with the VA offices across the city, Row New York delivers indoor rowing instruction at local VA centers. Support from the city Council will enable Row New York to continue delivering high quality programming for underserved veteran community and we count on the continued support and leadership of the committee on veterans to ensure that veterans throughout the city are given the resources they need to have positive mental, physical health outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration.

TOM WEBBER: Hello. My name is Tom Webber. I am Director of Care Management at SAGE. SAGE is an organization that has been around for 41 years now in New York City and services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender older adults and also educate about them and their needs and do advocacy on their behalf. We have a range of services across the city. We have five center in Manhattan. Well, lower Manhattan, upper Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Staten Island where we have daily hot meals, health and wellness programs, technology, cultural arts, socialization, etc. These are primarily DFTA funded. We also have case management programs, social

services, caregiver support, friendly visiting, HIV-positive programs, and the SAGE vets program, which I oversee. The SAGE vets program has been around for over three years. It was designed to actually help LGBT older veterans 50 and over to access veterans services and, for those who might have it discharge issue due to their sexual orientation, to work with them to get that discharge changed so they would be able to access veterans services. SAGE vets works with a variety of partners across the city, many of whom are in this room today, which we are very grateful for because we couldn't do it by ourselves. Legal entities, housing entities, other veteran service providers. DVS and Chair Deutsch, we want to say thank you, so, for having us at your veterans Roundtable and considering our request for city support. This program is currently supported through the New York State Legislature, but we have done a whole lot with it in the city, as well as, of course, across the state. So, actually, our SAGE vets coordinator who would generally be here is today actually being part of a human rights conference that the State Office of Veterans is producing today. So, we currently have 370 veterans who are engaged in our

various services and we are working with over 40 veterans around case-management, legal, and other kind of issues, hooking them up to vital services. We attempt to be everywhere at every place veterans are in New York City just letting people know about our community and the needs of our veterans, which are vast. And everything else that has been said about veterans in general in terms of mental health, substance abuse, isolation, etc., in older veterans is exacerbated for our population. So, for the first time, we are asking for support from the city to help us with the program within the city and we hope you will consider a request. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Tom.

Thank you very much.

RHONDA SHERWIN: Good afternoon, councilman Deutsch. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name is Rhonda Sherwin and I am a veterans financial coach. I'm an example of a non-veteran that has been brought into the community. My only connection two and a half years ago when I started as a financial coach was my father-in-law who is a 94 year old World War II veteran. For the past two and a half years, I have been under the direction

of the veterans financial coaching program funded by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, a federal agency. The program is ending on March 29 two to a lack of funding from the fear of. I am one of 60 coaches around the US that is affected by this closure. The news is very disappointing since it has proven to be a successful initiative within New York City and also nationwide. I started when DVS started. We've grown up together and I have been the single veteran financial coach representative in New York City. I have participated in New York Serves and I am currently on NYC Vet Connect since the beginning of the position and have serviced clients through that portal. After March 29th, the program will no longer be on the NYC Vet Connect. I am the only financial representative on NYC Vet Connect. While the federal program is ending, I'm seeking to continue the program on a local level. Managing finances is one of the most frequently mentioned issues that transitioning service members must deal with upon discharge and it is also one of the issues that is most often not addressed before decisions are made or behaviors are established. This program is the only one of its kind in New York City and it has

been growing steadily. It's important to keep the momentum going as it is ever increasing in visibility and positive change for so many veterans and their families. I go out to the community and look for veterans. I learned early in my position that going into fairs and setting up an office is okay, but the vets will not come to you. You have to go out and find them and that has been my differentiator. Under this project, I have serviced veterans at three residential shelters, Jericho Project Services for the Underserved, Samaritan Village Day Top, Single Stop, all the local vet centers, Manhattan and Bronx VA, hospitals, Veteran Advocacy Project, and even more. The current financial pro-- coaching program is the only structure that specifically serves veterans in the capacity of a pure financial support system without selling any product or being connected with any financial institution. The metrics speak to the success of the program. I've met with over 200 clients and many more if one includes those that participate in seminars. I have held over 300 individual sessions which doesn't even include the informal follow ups. And there is so much more. I wanted to connect with every CUNY student veteran

group, connect with other student veterans at other private colleges, connect with veterans committees on community boards, which is something I've just learned about. And expand services at homeless and residential shelters, giving those vets purpose of what the future could look like once they transition out into the community and increase my liaison with Manhattan VA and the Bronx VA. I've already set up office hours and have put contin-- and have continuing programs there. So, my request today is to ask the City Council to allocate some funding for this program and figure out a way to keep the program going because we're all on a very good path to helping so many people.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: All right. Thank you, Rhonda. We are going to have a budget roundtable, so I just want to thank everyone for coming out here today and for staying after 5 o'clock and this meeting is now adjourned. [gavel]  
[background comments]

TOM WEBBER: Thank you. Thank you for staying after 5 o'clock.

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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 April 19, 2019