



**Testimony of James Hendon  
Commissioner for New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)**

**New York City Council Committee on Veterans  
January 21 2020, 1:00pm**

***Introduction***

Good morning Chairman Deutsch, members of the committee, and advocates. Thank you for convening today's hearing. My name is James Hendon and I am proud to serve as the Commissioner for the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). I am joined today by Vincent Garcia, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs and Ombudsman at DVS.

First, I would like to wish you all a happy new year. As we move into this next year of life, we also embark on the exciting journey of a new chapter for this agency. As we refit and retool for the future, we will continue to provide the services and offerings that assist our constituency, while developing innovative and invaluable offerings to better connect and serve our veterans. It is our goal in entering this new chapter to continue taking an active approach in improving the economic development, wellness, and housing security for our veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors. As always, DVS staff members are proud to meet councilmembers at our Veteran Resource Centers to maintain our ongoing collaborations to better the New York City (NYC) veteran community.

***Agency Evolution Since 2016***

Since 2016, DVS has experienced tremendous growth. Initially occupying a space in the Mayor's Office, we have evolved into a team of over forty employees and growing. Since our inception, we have tackled some of the most dire situations facing our more vulnerable veterans, including homelessness and mental health. As we maintained our commitment to that goal, we have actively begun to include a handful of programs and services to address a number of other concerns facing veterans and their families in New York City such as VetConnectNYC, Service 2 Service, and Pay for Success. In looking back, the experience of the last few years has helped us see the opportunities for improvement to better serve our constituency and the growth that comes along with it.

***Lessons Learned***

With a committed staff and enthusiastic commissioner, DVS began a revolutionary undertaking to become the first local, municipal agency to handle veteran issues. In being the first to complete anything at this level within the country, there were a number of successes and areas that needed improvement. In entering this agency at this current time, I have been fortunate to reflect and understand that while great work has been done, we need to do more.

First, we learn that there is no substitute for “boots on the ground,” or “in person” connections. Veterans and the number of sub-groups we serve include the elderly, students, family members, LGBTQ+ persons, women, those transitioning from service, or even those now just entering the service. Each requires a unique, diverse, and personal approach that technology alone cannot solve. In reflecting upon those people whom we have reached -- and understanding the need to expand our reach -- DVS commits itself to not only target the aforementioned groups, but strive in providing them with a face and body in lieu of just an agency name and contact.

Next, DVS has done a phenomenal job of assisting those in distressful situations like homelessness. Under the leadership of former Commissioner Sutton, DVS, our sister agencies like DHS, the Mayor’s office, and the City Council Veteran Committee have been able to drastically reduce veteran homelessness numbers despite the uptick in homeless in the overall City population. Most recently, DVS reported a veteran homelessness count of 690, five less than the previous year Point in Time Count. Yet, while we are still committed to ensuring that every veteran has the security of a place to rest their head safely at night, our outreach to those not within the most vulnerable of populations such as young working professionals, middle-class families, and those looking to purchase a home is an area of opportunity. Therefore, in entering this next chapter, we will focus our efforts towards engaging the larger market-share of veterans while maintaining our commitments to more vulnerable members of our community.

### ***Plans for the Future***

As we enter this new chapter, DVS is actively working on developing meaningful and innovative policy measures to empower, improve, and inform veterans of the economic opportunities and benefits available to them throughout all levels of government. Further, as an agency, we commit ourselves to better the overall well-being of our veterans, whether financial, mental, emotional, or otherwise; all the while empowering, preserving, and/or maintaining housing opportunity. While this journey may not be easy, it is critical for our veterans. To begin meeting this goal, we are holding a Partnership Convening event on February 6<sup>th</sup> to begin the initial steps in listening, learning, and engaging with our community on a deeper level. Invitations were also sent to each committee council member, along with Citywide Veterans Director Mr. Joseph Bello. We hope to see you all in attendance for this phenomenal event.

### ***Goals to Improve and Expand***

To be able to best assist the constituency that we serve, we first must begin to examine our internal agency operations. As we began this phase shortly after my arrival, DVS is presently undergoing a reconfiguration into three teams; Current Operations, Future Operations, and Administration. Through this reconfiguration, DVS can maintain its present commitments to our constituents within our Current Operations team. That can include housing homeless veterans, conducting targeted outreach within the community, and engaging organizations, non-profits, and VSOs to get the word out. Under Future Operations, DVS staff will develop strategic and data focused initiatives to better one’s future. Once Future Operations finalizes a policy proposal, that final product will then move to the Current Operations team to execute. Lastly to provide each group with a solid foundation to complete their work is the Administration. This can include notable tasks such as payroll and HR, to larger roles like the IGA Director and General Counsel to

Sheppard work to completion such as reviewing a document for legal clarity and/or reviewing proposals and their feasibility with the number of partners involved.

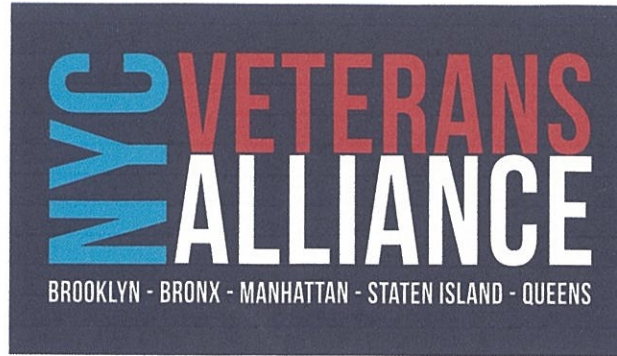
Next, we will bring those “boots to the ground”. Under our reconfiguration of Current Operations, DVS will continue maintain a presence in each borough, but expand its reach with dedicated teams focused on the needs of a particular sub-groups. Whether they are LGBTQ+ veterans, students utilizing some form of a G.I. Bill, or those interested in entrepreneurship, DVS will expand its reach, broaden our community, and through that, empower and inform these individuals.

Lastly, we seek to assist in the creation of long lasting, generational wealth for our veterans. Most notably, since World War II, the veteran community and the G.I. Bill has been an invaluable tool in uplifting people into the middle class and providing opportunities to do so. While there is an array of benefits afforded, being able to navigate the ever-changing field of benefits and being aware of those changes has prevented many veterans from accessing them. Therefore, it is not only our goal to help benefits access these benefits, but to empower them with the knowledge to make informed, strategic decisions that benefit them, and their families for generations to come.

### ***Conclusion***

As DVS continues its upward trajectory into this next chapter, we will continue to expand on the work we’ve done thus far as we seek new endeavors. We thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter and we look forward to addressing some of the topics discussed in the coming months. We are happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.

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Testimony by

James Fitzgerald  
Deputy Director, NYC Veterans Alliance

New York City Council  
Committee on Veterans

Hearing on

Oversight – The Future of Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)

January 21, 2020

Good afternoon and thank you to Chair Deutsch and Committee Members for this opportunity to testify today. My name is James Fitzgerald and I am the Deputy Director of the NYC Veterans Alliance, a member-driven, grassroots policy advocacy and community-building organization that advances veterans and families as civic leaders. We work with more than 150 community organizations across the NYC Metro area to promote events for veterans and families posted online at OurVeterans.NYC, our year-round online resource hub visited by more than 4,000 users each month. We also remain the only organization dedicated to local-level advocacy for veterans and families here in NYC. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to present testimony before you today.

I would like to begin by extending congratulations to Commissioner James Hendon on his recent appointment as head of the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). We appreciate and thank him for his continuing service to New York City and the United States of America.

The NYC Veterans Alliance was a key advocate for the creation of the Department of Veterans' Services to support our city's approximate population of 210,000 veterans (about ¼ of our state's veterans) plus an estimated 250,000 caregivers and family members connected with those veterans. Our membership strongly supports our continuous efforts to set high expectations for the role of DVS in NYC and beyond, and there is much to be optimistic about as we look toward the future of DVS. We applaud the great work that has been accomplished by DVS, but there is still much work left to be done. Therefore, we present some items to highlight concerning the future of DVS:

1. We applaud the Mayor's Preliminary Budget proposal of \$6.68 million for DVS in Fiscal Year 2021. We believe this steady increase in funding will allow DVS to continue growing and improving the quality of its outreach and services. With increased resources, the next fiscal year should show high marks in performance as the agency truly hits its stride.
2. We strongly urge the inclusion of an Agency Chief Contracting Officer (ACCO) in DVS's budget and staffing proposal. DVS needs the ability to manage and monitor their significant contract with Northwell for VetConnectNYC, as currently overseen by DCAS, an agency that does not have fluency or competency with veterans' services. The ACCO's contracting and procurement expertise can enhance the agency's ability to provide crucial oversight of discretionary funds from the Council to organizations that provide services to veterans and their families, as well as managing its own Request for Proposal (RFP) processes. Oversight of city funds going to veterans' services is a basic agency responsibility, and would at last bring DVS into alignment with its state and federal counterparts. We urge the Council to ensure DVS has no further delays on establishing and managing contracts and procurement

going forward, as this is a necessary function for DVS to truly operate as an independent agency.

3. We strongly urge continued investment in DVS's robust and capable full-time Human Resources staffing so that it provides best-in-class, in-house support for the agency's growing cadre of employees, the vast majority of whom are themselves veterans and family members. Retention and development of DVS's current staff can ensure the agency attracts and keeps its best talent and builds essential knowledge and experience over the long term to best serve our community. City government is the largest employer of veterans, military reservists, and their family members in NYC—and it needs to be the best employer. DVS should be fully empowered to be a shining example of “what right looks like” in supporting veterans, military reservists, and family members as employees in city government, and in the city as a whole.
4. We strongly urge that DVS establish in-house capability to provide consultation on and direct filing of VA claims. In an era where veteran service organizations no longer have capacity and funding to meet the demand of this essential service to the veterans community, it is incumbent on local government to step up with VA-accredited staff who do have this capability. DVS's Community Outreach staff are not currently able to offer direct assistance with VA claims, and so this service is referred out. With the increased funding projected for the next fiscal year, we strongly urge the Council to support DVS in being able to provide this essential service to our community.
5. DVS's core services and accomplishments should be accurately reflected in the annual Mayor's Management Report (MMR), and it should also be transparent about areas where more support for improvement is needed. For example, last fall's MMR reported that DVS provided homeless prevention assistance to 438 veterans and permanent housing to 158 veterans—both of those numbers representing fewer veterans served from the previous year. Not included in the report were the more than 600 veterans who remained homeless in the city's shelter system, or an explanation of where further support was needed to get those veterans services and permanent housing. The MMR also shows the number of community members “engaged” and “given assistance,” but the definitions of these metrics should be more clear and representative of the true work being done and the impacts on the lives of veterans and families in NYC. We look forward to improved reporting of DVS's impacts in future years, and improved transparency about the further support DVS needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony today. Pending your questions, this concludes my testimony.



Testimony of

Sam Sloane

Trial Attorney, Veterans Court Specialist

New York County Defender Services

Before the

Committee on Veterans

Oversight Hearing – The Future of DVS

January 21, 2020

My name is Sam Sloane. I have been a public defender with New York County Defender Services for the past five years. NYCDS is a public defender office that represents people in thousands of cases in Manhattan criminal courts every year. Throughout my time at NYCDS, I have represented clients in both Criminal and Supreme Court, from arraignment through trial. Additionally, I have extensive experience with the various Alternatives to Incarceration offered in Manhattan Supreme Court; specifically, Judicial Diversion, Mental Health Court and Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court. This experience has led me to adopt my new role as the Veterans Court Specialist.

I was excited to learn about the important work that the New York City Department of Veterans' Services is doing to support our city's veterans, particularly in their work to end chronic veterans' homelessness. Homelessness is one of the greatest challenges to ending the cycle of incarceration, and we welcome the influx of any city resources to target this problem. In my role as NYCDS Veterans Specialist, I have not yet worked directly with DVS or seen them in the Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court. Yet I would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with DVS and strengthen the connection between DVS and the court system.

At NYCDS, one of the first questions we ask at arraignments is whether our client has a history of military service. We do this for a number of reasons. From the outset, military service provides a well-deserved avenue for mitigation. Additionally, military service records can give

us critical insight into the nature of some of the underlying problems facing the people we represent, such as drug addiction or P.T.S.D. Additionally, I've had cases where the client suffered a traumatic brain injury during a training accident and has never been the same since. We typically meet clients at particularly low moments of their lives; however, clients with a history of military service can often refer us to people who served with them and knew them as someone entirely different. This type of information is both crucial and necessary for the representation of our clients regardless of the charge.

Additionally, military service information is crucial for us to locate potentially beneficial services for our clients. Together with the help of our VJO (Veterans Justice Outreach), we connect eligible clients to VA benefits that they may either not be taking advantage of or may not even know they're entitled to. This can help with housing, treatment, and employment. We also work with the New York State Veterans Defense Project, who help us understand and obtain military records.

Finally, qualified candidates may be eligible for Manhattan Veterans Treatment Court, which is a treatment court set aside for individuals with a documented history of military service who are currently facing felony charges. These are individuals who are generally facing the prospect of prison and are often caught in a vicious cycle of addiction and homelessness. MVTC is unique in that the clients are surrounded by other veterans who share similar experiences and can relate on a deeper level. At every court appearance, the clients are met by peer mentors, veterans themselves, and the VJO to help navigate clients through the process. I have seen a number of clients turn their lives around because of MVTC.

NYCDS looks forward to working with both DVS and the New York City Council to ensure that all of our city's veterans have access to the services to which they are entitled thanks to their military service and to help veterans limit or end future criminal justice system involvement.

If you have any questions about my testimony or New York County Defender Service's work with veteran clients, please contact me at [ssloane@nycds.org](mailto:ssloane@nycds.org).



**New York City Council  
Committee on Veterans  
Tuesday, January 21, 2020, 1:00 p.m.  
Testimony RE: Oversight – The Future of DVS**

Good afternoon. My name is Peter Kempner. I am the Legal Director at Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS). VOLS was established in 1984 and our purpose is to leverage private attorneys to provide free legal services to low income New Yorkers to fill the justice gap.

Our Veterans Initiative conducts free weekly legal clinics at the Manhattan Campus of the Department of Veterans Affairs' NY Harbor Health Care System where we provide free civil legal services to low income veterans aged 60 and over. A core part of our work is to provide free wills and advance directives to low income senior veterans. These critical documents ensure that the wishes of senior veterans are carried out by the people they love and trust the most. They also ensure that senior veterans are able to live in the community for as long as possible, prevent displacement, and help to avoid costly and unpleasant legal proceedings like guardianships if a veteran becomes incapacitated.

In addition to my duties as Legal Director of VOLS, I also created and teach the Veterans Justice Clinic at New York Law School; I sit on the New York City Bar Association's Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs; I co-chair the New York City Legal Services Veterans Working Group; and I have held many past positions focused on the civil legal services needs of low income veterans.

We thank the New York City Council's Committee on Veterans for holding this important hearing. As the New York City Department of Veterans Services (DVS) enters its fourth year this is a great time for both DVS and the New York City Council to reflect on what we have done as a community to improve the lives of New Yorkers who have worn the uniform and to look forward to what more we can do to help our veterans in need. As we look forward, I would like to highlight two issues which are critical for DVS and the City Council to address in order to improve the lives of our City's Veterans. The first is the ability of veterans to access benefits from the Department of Veterans Services and the second is the City's efforts to continue to address veteran homelessness. The common thread that brings these issues together is how access to free legal counsel can be transformative for veterans in need.

This past summer, the Association of the New York City Bar published a report concerning the inadequate financial support for legal services in connection with VA benefits. The report highlights several disturbing facts. New York State has the fifth largest veteran population in the country, but lags far behind other states in benefits received from the VA. Per the VA's own reporting, less than 17% of veterans statewide and only 15.5% of NYC veterans received either Disability Compensation or Pension benefits, compared to an estimated 23 to 24% of veterans nationally. Additionally, per the VA's own statistics, New York veterans have lower income and educational attainment than other veterans, showing they need VA benefits more, not less, than veterans across the nation. If the percentage of New York's veterans receiving either Disability Compensation or Pension Benefits matched the national average, more than fifty thousand additional New York veterans and their families would be receiving VA benefits. These benefits allow veterans to access stable housing, care for themselves and live with dignity.

The City Bar's report highlights that most veterans have to try to navigate the VA's system pro se or with a non-attorney because of the lack of Veterans Law practitioners. Despite this clear justice gap for veterans, there is no State or City program in place in New York to systemically provide free attorneys to veterans seeking VA benefits. Yet New York has numerous programs in place to provide free legal services to other populations who need free counsel. For instance New York has the Disability Advocacy

Program (DAP), which provides free legal representation to disabled individuals in hearings before the Social Security Administration. New York funds this program and others like it because access to Social Security benefits allows individuals to move off state and local funded benefits like public assistance, and to better afford stable housing which reduces homelessness. Moreover, programs like DAP pay for themselves, bringing millions of dollars to the state and local economy. This model can be easily translated to the world of veterans' benefits. The creation and funding of a Veterans Disability Advocacy Program or "V-DAP" would afford free legal counsel to veterans in actions before the VA and a program like this should be championed and led by DVS.

The City and DVS, working along with the VA and community partners, have made tremendous strides in addressing veteran homelessness but we must be vigilant to ensure that this progress is maintained. The best way to address veteran homelessness is to ensure it does not happen in the first place. This means doing everything we can to prevent the eviction of veteran tenants. New York City recognizes that a key element of eviction prevention is ensuring tenants have access to free legal services in Housing Court. The passage and implementation of the Universal Access to Counsel Law has been historic and as a result evictions in New York City have fallen dramatically. Until Universal Access to Counsel is fully implemented in 2022, many veterans living outside the covered zip codes will not have representation in housing court. After 2022, there will still be many veterans without counsel in housing court because their income exceeds the threshold of 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. In 2019, a veteran whose income is a mere \$2,100 per month is over income, regardless of their housing costs and other expenses. However, many veterans are totally and permanently disabled due to injuries sustained during their service and receive benefits from the VA totaling \$3,106.04 per month. These veterans are disqualified from receiving counsel under the Universal Access to Counsel program.

These are the veterans who sacrificed the most in service to the nation and the guidelines for Universal Access deny them access to the program. A bill pending before the Council, Int. 1104-2018, would remedy this by increasing the eligibility threshold for Universal Access to Counsel to 400% of the federal poverty guidelines. Increasing eligibility to 400% of the poverty level will ensure that disabled veterans, can access free legal services to prevent the loss of their housing. It would also bring the program in line with other programs like the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption which sets eligibility at \$50,000 per year, an amount which lines up almost exactly with 400% of the federal poverty level for a household of one.

Beyond a legislative fix for the exclusion of the most disabled veterans from being able to access free attorneys in eviction cases, DVS should be working closely with the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) to ensure that veterans are able to access eviction prevention services. We know that DVS already works closely with HRA to rehouse homeless veterans, but HRA does not screen for veteran status when determining whether a tenant will have access to free counsel in Housing Court and many veterans are slipping through the cracks and are being forced to fight evictions on their own.

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to testify. Volunteers of Legal Services looks forward to working with the City Council and the administration to ensure that New York City is able to best support our seniors in need.

Peter Kempner  
Legal Director

Good afternoon members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Coco Culhane and I am the executive director of the Veteran Advocacy Project. We provide free legal services to low-income veterans and their families, with a focus on those living with post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, substance use disorders, and other mental health conditions.

I would like to start by saying that Veteran Advocacy or, "VAP", has worked with incredible city advocates from the Department of Veterans Services and going back to the days of MOVA. As I have testified previously, there are individuals at DVS serving constituents with incredible dedication who my team turns to regularly because we know we can count on them. This is the heart of the agency and the heart of its mission. Making sure that servicemembers, veterans, and their families are informed and can access the assistance they need and the benefits they have earned.

In the lead up to this hearing, VAP made an effort to confirm that it was not just because an advocate was calling DVS that a veteran was getting top service. Too often at many agencies, a connection, knowing someone, is the only way to get through to help. So, we had clients call DVS themselves asking for information in a number of areas and the results were thorough, impressive, and something to be emulated by any agency.

However, no one would have any way of knowing this. Outside of its housing and homelessness efforts, DVS has released painfully little data. A law was passed last year that required DVS to publish very specific data on its website no later than December 15, 2019. I could not find that information and it is January. Even if we are to look at the Mayor's Management Report, New Yorkers will find just a few numbers showing a slight decrease in constituents served; and a good portion of the short report is about how they added the word "families" to their goals.

What does get published, what has been highlighted at the agency, has been a series of big ideas announced in verbose press releases, with seemingly no follow through.

If you peruse what DVS has announced, what they are doing it is fantastic, monumental. Unfortunately, it appears that DVS has been producing more ideas than programs. I say this based not only on my organization's experience with DVS but also our attempts to figure out what is actually going on. VAP has never been able to establish a collaboration or confirm that certain programs are in existence. For example, we launched our justice-involved veterans initiative this past year; we were thrilled to hear that DVS was working to ensure that veterans being discharged from Rikers were connected to appropriate services. We asked how we could team up. Turns out there had only been a press release a year prior. A DVS employee wrote to me that's all there was. After the grand opening of the Veterans Unit, I was informed, DVS was never again at Rikers or involved in any way. That is not what the public was told.

Another example, one I have repeatedly asked about, is the Core 4 model. At each level, it is difficult to understand what DVS has done. Arts and Culture are supposed to be the largest component to the model, the base of connection for veterans. In 2017, Artist in Residency, Brian Doerries' Theater of War became a shining example of the intersection between art and veterans

and healing; to date it is the only cultural activity I can find on DVS's website. If you go through each core level of the model, there are simply organizations listed and no one at any of these organizations has been able to articulate what their participation means or what their mandate from DVS is. In countless conversations, all I have been able to ascertain is that DVS hosted initial meetings and then no one ever heard from them again. What good is a model is not implemented?

Good intentions are not trackable – there is no data produced.

A little over a year ago DVS listed its priorities for 2019: Vets on Campus; Mentor a Vet; Veteran Career Council. I was told by a current city employee the mentorship program is another initiative where organizations were all brought into a room once and nothing else has ever occurred. What is the Career Council? The DVS website lists components but has no link, no information. Is it a group of people? Businesses? How can a veteran get assistance? The annual report says it provides job paths for veterans. How? How would a veteran find out?

DVS's mission is to inform, educate, and connect. A website is essential then. To be sure, what organization among us doesn't have a broken link or clunky page on our site? (Maybe it's just VAP?) If you go through the DVS website tab by tab, there is an astonishing lack of information under certain sections. I will not read through every example, but suffice it to say many of the programs announced via press release, if listed, have absolutely no information. DVS's own "Start Up Report," covering the first three years of the agency, has a list of milestones, almost none of which are DVS accomplishments. For instance, treatment courts opened in Staten Island and Manhattan in 2016—what did DVS do? Another report says they toured the Staten Island VTC in July to assess how to best support VTCs in NYC—what came of that? How is DVS supporting treatment courts in five boroughs? We work in a few of them and have never heard of any support. Further, I was this morning after double checking I wasn't missing something: nothing has happened and DVS has never assisted.

The Start Up Report lists the local laws that have been passed they must now follow, including reporting on numbers and creating a resource guide. Neither has been done in accordance with the laws. The Resource Guide is listed on the site with a date of July 2019. Download it and you see an April 2019 flyer that is essentially an infographic explaining what veterans come to DVS seeking—not a guide of resources. The health section lists the core 4 layers and that's it. Nothing else. Not even a number or a sentence saying there are many options for health care, call us. The legal section says that the City Bar can help you with any legal need. Not only is that inaccurate, they are so far backed up that a veteran can't even get the services they do offer. I could go on... How is this a resource guide?

Then there are the new elements of the website that were touted as leaps forward in September 2019. Under the Get Help Button one finds both Vet Connect and a new Resource Map. I entered "housing" into the map—seemed like a reasonable query to try. It took me to a location in Malawi. That the largest city in the country has a website with that kind of info for our veterans is an embarrassment. It might be comical if there weren't homeless vets on our streets right now. But there are. Our veterans deserve better. How has DVS let that map or that "resource" list sit live on the site? Perhaps more important: Who is holding DVS accountable for this?

DVS talked about their programs with Australia and Greece and the United Nations. Again, great press releases. What programs did they discuss? Did they talk about outcomes? Aside from housing, not sure they could. Where is the data about what veterans are seeking, what trends are showing up in needs? Why is this the only city agency that doesn't have to quantify its services in a meaningful way? The "start up" explanation must stop.

DVS cannot be all things to all veterans. It cannot run support for treatment courts, provide legal representation, go out to Rikers, and be in all five boroughs every week. They also cannot keep claiming they do. At last count, the list of DVS employees includes 17 people who have either "commissioner" or "director" in their title. That's a lot of command and not many troops. Who is actually doing the work the of the programs? The new era at DVS needs to be focused, transparent, and accountable to New Yorkers. There is a moment here to assess what is working, what is needed, and how best to do it, but it has to start with data. And if there is not data showing something is effective after a while, then let's get rid of it. DVS has that flexibility to build in creative ways as a new agency—but it requires transparency and accountability to adapt and do better.

VAP looks forward to the next phase of DVS and has hope that what the agency does best, connecting veterans in need—from a homeless veteran to someone just looking for a little assistance on a mortgage or maybe a career change—will remain focus of the mission. The next phase can build on the strengths of the incredible people who make up the staff. In a new era, ideas should be planned out before being announced. Everything can be executed with excellence and *outlive its press release*.

We look forward to working with the new commissioner and the many new faces at DVS. There is a sea of good will at the agency, including incredibly dedicated veterans continuing their service, and we hope that their talents are used in programs that effectively serve all of New York's military community.



Statement of Jeremy Butler  
*Before the* New York City Council  
Oversight - The Future of DVS  
January 21, 2020

**Statement of Jeremy Butler**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
*of*  
**Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America**  
*before the*  
**New York City Council Committee on Veterans**

**January 21, 2020**

Distinguished Members of the New York City Council, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and our more than 425,000 members and supporters, we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the future of the Department of Veteran Services (DVS).

While our members are spread throughout the nation, we are proud to say that our national headquarters is located in New York City. Since its beginning, IAVA has been successful in fighting and advocating for policies to meet the needs of our nation's veterans and first responders, including the Post-9/11 GI Bill, VA reform, filling gaps in care for women veterans, and the *James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Reauthorization Act*. Additionally, we are proud that IAVA was an initial proponent for the creation, proper funding, and oversight of New York City's DVS. We want to see it succeed.

DVS has enormous potential and its establishment was a historic moment for veterans of New York City. DVS can serve to significantly streamline access and improve service delivery to many of the most critical veteran-specific programs and resources already available here. Today we are here to report on matters that we believe will help improve and strengthen DVS in the future. We hope that this testimony will work to better inform this Committee's decisions as they relate to the oversight of this critical program as it continues to take shape and deeper integrates into the services infrastructure of this great city.

In 2015, IAVA and our partners jump-started a national conversation on veteran suicide, but the issue continues to rise. In our 2019 Annual Member Survey, 43% of our members reported suicidal ideation since joining the military, a shocking 12% rise since 2014. Additionally, 59% of IAVA members personally know a veteran who died by suicide, a 19% rise since 2014. The urgency to effectively deliver critical and relevant services to veterans in need has never been greater.



In order to deal with the increase in veteran suicide, DVS must have the capability to serve veterans in crisis in a timely manner. A clear deficit we see within DVS is the lack of a comprehensive case management component and an over-reliance on third party programs to make referrals and connections to resources. DVS was established in 2016, but the department still does not have an in-house Veterans Service Officer or case manager. IAVA recommends that DVS create and adequately fund these positions. An in-house Veteran Service Officer would be able to advise clients on their VA benefits, initiate discharge upgrade applications, and assist veterans in filing the necessary claims or appeals.

These positions are critical to the success of DVS and the veterans that it supports. Removing the additionally steps to getting veterans the services and benefits they have earned will prevent them from falling into the cracks of a giant and intimidating bureaucracy. Without deeper integration into the veteran services infrastructure in New York City and nationally, the potential of DVS will be limited.

Furthermore, IAVA would like to note that DVS does not have an in-house Agency Chief Contracting Officer. DVS has an annual budget that exceeds \$5.3 million, but these funds are currently monitored by other city agencies that are unrelated to veteran services. This process adds unnecessary steps and could possibly lead to error and delay by staffers who may be unfamiliar with DVS's programs. IAVA recommends that in order to most effectively manage funds and award contracts that the DVS create and adequately fund a contracting officer position.

IAVA thanks the committee for its dedication to helping to strengthen, fund and provide oversight of the DVS. Thank you for the opportunity to share IAVA's views on these important issues today. We look forward to working with the Committee in the future.

Good afternoon chair Deutsch and fellow City Council members.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify here today.

My name is Eric Rosenbaum and I am the President and chief executive officer of Project Renewal, a New York City homeless services nonprofit agency.

For more than 53 years, Project Renewal has empowered individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk to renew their lives through critical programs focused on health, homes and jobs.

Each year we serve nearly 15,000 New Yorkers, including hundreds of veterans.

We are grateful to Speaker Johnson, Chair Deutsch, and the City Council for their generous support of Project Renewal's homeless prevention services for veterans – support that has been crucial for us to help veterans across all of our programs.

In FY2019, we have provided health care to over 140 veterans at our mobile medical vans and shelter-based clinics, and through our psychiatry and substance use disorder programs.

And, we successfully placed more than a quarter of the veterans living in our homeless shelters into permanent housing. In the past two years, over 87% of the veterans we have admitted to our housing programs have successfully maintained their housing, thanks to our on-going support services.

But what I want to focus on today is the life-changing impact that our workforce development programs have on the veterans. We believe that the men and women who have served our country deserve sustainable employment and a living wage.

Our workforce development programs, which help our clients obtain and keep career-path jobs, served 42 veterans in 2019.

One such program, our award-winning culinary arts training program, places 80% of graduates in jobs—higher than the national average for similar programs. We've placed veterans in great jobs at restaurants, institutional and corporate kitchens, and at our own social-purpose catering company, City Beet Kitchens, which employs our trainees.

Additionally, our Next Step program provides job training, internship placements, and retention support for our clients—including 36 veterans in FY2019.

A Queens native named Andrew is the perfect example of how Project Renewal's comprehensive services—including job training—help veterans overcome the complex challenges they face.

Andrew served as a sonar technician in the Navy. But his career was cut short when he became addicted to crack cocaine. He couldn't hold a job and spent years in and out of homeless shelters.

Then Andrew came to Project Renewal's Recovery Center, the nation's first outpatient clinic for homeless adults struggling with addiction. He enrolled in Next Step and we trained him for a career in social services. Today, Andrew is employed and working towards independent living, thanks to his new job. He has been drug-free for over seven months.

We want to continue renewing the lives of veterans like Andrew. With further support from the City Council, we have an opportunity to expand our workforce development programs and ensure that more veterans achieve the economic stability they need to live independently.

We applaud the city for creating the Department of Veterans' Services over three years ago. Project Renewal strongly supports the department and values our role as a partner in its mission. We look forward to working more with DVS and welcome suggestions for greater partnership in the future.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions.



Visiting Nurse Service of New York  
220 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10017  
[www.vnsny.org](http://www.vnsny.org)

**NYC Council Committee on Veterans Oversight Hearing:  
The Future of the Department of Veterans' Services**  
*Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY)*  
Tuesday, January 21, 2020

Good afternoon Chair Deutsch and Members of the City Council Committee on Veterans. My name is Joe Vitti and I am the Supervisor of the Hospice Veterans Program for the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY) – I also served in the Army as a battalion intelligence officer for a field artillery unit. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and speak about the services VNSNY provides to veterans in New York City (NYC), as well as discuss how we have worked with the NYC DVS. I also wish to extend a welcome to Lieutenant Colonel Hendon. We look forward to working with you and your office to better serve our City's veterans.

VNSNY is the largest not-for-profit home and community-based health care organization in the United States, providing care to more than 44,000 patients and health plan members every day. More than 125 years ago, VNSNY began serving immigrants on the Lower East Side who were shunned by traditional medical institutions. Since then, VNSNY has continuously provided critical home and community-based healthcare services to marginalized populations, including ethnic and racial minorities, veterans, LGBTQ individuals, immigrants, the frail elderly, and people living with mental illness and physical disabilities.

For over 35 years, VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care has provided end-of-life care to New Yorkers. VNSNY Hospice is now the 8<sup>th</sup> largest nationally, and the largest hospice provider to veterans in the state – *last year we conducted 876 Veteran patient admissions.*

VNSNY's Hospice Veterans Program is a Level 5 (the highest level) *We Honor Veterans Program* – one of two in NYC. This national collaboration between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) recognizes hospices that provide a high level of care to veterans, including educating themselves on the population's needs and providing culturally sensitive care. Meanwhile, VNSNY's Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) offers in-home healthcare services (physical, occupational, and speech therapy, nursing support and referrals to social services and behavioral health) to patients who need rehabilitation services from an injury or illness.

VNSNY is proud to be a contracted community care network provider under the newly implemented VA MISSION Act. We are a preferred vendor of home health care and hospice services for when NYC veterans are being discharged from VA hospitals and also partner with the NYS Veterans Skilled Nursing Facility at St. Albans.

As NYC's Veteran population continues to get older (26% of VNSNY's veterans are from WWII, 20% from Korea, 18% from Vietnam, 3% from the Cold War and 33% from Peacetime/Other), it is becoming even more important to conduct outreach so that they know about their full VA benefits, which can cover home care, hospice and long-term care services. Our outreach program currently has three veteran liaisons that serve all five

boroughs, with most of our veteran patients coming from Manhattan (32%), Queens (24%) and Brooklyn (21%).

### **Collaboration with NYC Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)**

VNSNY has had the honor to work with DVS since its launch in 2016. DVS has assisted VNSNY with recovering discharge papers (DD214s) and military records for veterans under our care. In addition, DVS has helped veterans who do not have family or social support and/or have severe financial restrictions receive military honors with a full burial at Calverton National Cemetery. This kind of collaboration between VNSNY and DVS helps bring closure to veterans and their families, and demonstrates a tremendous sense of support and confidence that organizations, like ours, are actively trying to improve the lives of veterans and their loved ones after their many years of selfless courage and dedication to our nation.

One of my first patients at VNSNY was also one of my first introductions to the support DVS provides in these types of cases. The patient was a young Marine and a father of three young children. Being a Marine was arguably one of the proudest achievements in his life, but, unfortunately, he had encountered financial struggles and had lost all of his military records. Time was of the essence to recover his records because of his deteriorating health. As he neared the end of his life, he wanted to receive a military burial from his fellow Marines and for his children to know that he served honorably. DVS' quick turnaround in recovering his discharge papers, and then organizing and authorizing his burial in Calverton Cemetery was everything to his family and truly brought a wonderful and beautiful moment during such trying times.<sup>1</sup>

### **Service Gaps**

There are approximately 22.5 million veterans in America today, about 18 million of whom are over the age of 65. Veterans comprise about 25% of our country's deaths every day (1,600 daily). This community has diverse and complex physical and mental health needs that the VA (our nation's largest healthcare system) addresses with a multitude of services and benefits. However, because of the complexity of the VA system and systemic poor health literacy among veterans, many veterans never fully access or utilize the benefits they need.

To help, VNSNY conducts community outreach events to educate veterans and build their awareness of the care services within VNSNY.

***Support opportunity:*** The demand for these programs signals that additional outreach efforts are required to ensure that veterans get the support and resources they need and deserve. With support from the NYC Council and continued collaboration with DVS, more veterans can learn of their VA benefits and access critical services from VNSNY and other providers of quality health care services for veterans.

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<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan, Kuwait veteran Yancy Farrington determined to fight cancer with help from We Honor Veterans program <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/program-veterans-aims-terminally-ill-article-1.2562704>

### **Patient Story**

Our cultural understanding and demonstration of addressing the various prevalent diseases (service-connected illnesses) was demonstrated with a veteran patient on Staten Island. He had served in the U.S. Army's Military Intelligence Corps during the Vietnam War and suffered from PTSD, lung cancer, COPD, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. The veteran had a loving and supportive wife, who also cared for their 40-year-old son who was legally blind and a legal dependent of his parents.

The patient had sought health services outside the VA health system while still being followed by his VA doctors. These additional health services attributed to very costly healthcare bills that put the family in a severe financial crisis – on the verge of losing their home. The patient was 50% VA disabled for PTSD, but not for his lung cancer, which was due to his exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. This left his family without potential VA survivor benefits, causing additional stress and anxiety for the household.

Our Veterans' program has gained the trust of local military veteran healthcare professionals and won the trust of patients by recognizing and celebrating their service with challenge coins, volunteer made military knitted blankets, and a certificate. In this case, our efforts resulted in healthcare professionals guiding and consulting the family in successfully applying and working with other veteran organizations service officers to file for Agent Orange exposure - qualifying the family for 100% service connection and continued benefits for the spouse and son following the patient's death.<sup>2</sup>

This patient's case is one of many where we have implemented cultural sensitivity training for our staff, as well as within our healthcare informatic practices. The collection of this data has enabled VNSNY to assess areas of opportunity to help address veterans in the community - it helps us see the current health landscape for veterans in NYC.

### **Conclusion:**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and for considering funding opportunities to improve the lives of our City's veterans. We look forward to growing our collaboration with DVS and the NYC Council Committee on Veterans.

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<sup>2</sup> NY1 News Video <https://vimeo.com/334949757>



## Row New York Veterans Rowing Program

**About Row New York:** Through the discipline of rowing and rigorous academic support, Row New York transforms the lives of New Yorkers, regardless of background or ability.

**Veterans Rowing Program:** Row New York's Veterans Rowing Program provides opportunities to experience the sport of rowing to hundreds of New York City's veterans. The program is designed to help veterans and military service members avoid poor health outcomes such as obesity and depression by offering land-based and on-water workouts led by experienced rowing coaches. Veterans build strength, speed, endurance, and mobility, and benefit from the opportunity to compete on a team, belong to a supportive community, and experience New York City's waterways. Recreational and Competitive programs take place at the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse in Manhattan and the World's Fair Boathouse in Queens.



**Adaptive Rowing:** Row New York proudly serves veterans with disabilities at our boathouses in Manhattan and Queens, VA centers, and partner veterans services organizations. Since 2013, when RNY was certified by the U.S. Olympic Committee as a U.S. Paralympic Sports Club (the only club of its kind in New York City), we have continually worked to expand the reach of our adaptive programming, and to build relationships with other organizations dedicated to expanding athletic opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The design of our program ensures that any veteran with a disability can choose an appropriate level, from a one-time demonstration to regular competitive practice.

Row New York's Veterans Rowing Program encompasses the following:

- **Competitive Adaptive Program:** Veterans meet three days per week to practice for competitive races, including the C.R.A.S.H.-B Indoor Rowing Championship in Boston, MA, and the Mid-Atlantic Erg Sprints in Alexandria, VA. Row New York coaches create individualized training plans for each rower based on their goals and needs.
- **Recreational Program:** Veterans learn the fundamentals of rowing, build technique, improve mobility, and enjoy outdoor and indoor workouts.
- **Indoor VA Program:** Row New York delivers indoor rowing instruction at local VA Centers in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens throughout the year.

For more information, please contact Denise Aquino, Director of Community Rowing, at [daquino@rownewyork.org](mailto:daquino@rownewyork.org) or call (718) 433-3075x205.



**New York City Council Committee on Veterans Testimony, January 21, 2020**  
**Charlotte Martin, Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum**

Good afternoon. My name is Charlotte Martin, and I work at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, as senior manager of access initiatives. I have the privilege of overseeing the Museum's veterans access initiative, for which we offer a range of programs and resources for current and former service members and their families. I do want to take a moment to acknowledge the generous financial and advisory support of the City Council Committee on Veterans. Thank you to Chair Deutsch, Council Members Vallone, Eugene, Ampry-Samuel and Maisel, and the committee staff for your ongoing efforts to connect veterans with one another and with cultural resources like the Intrepid Museum.

At the Intrepid Museum, our mission is to promote the awareness and understanding of history, science and service in order to honor our heroes, educate the public and inspire our youth. Centered on a former Navy aircraft carrier, we have long engaged veterans through Veterans Day and Memorial Day events, Fleet Week activities, a robust volunteer program and free admission for veterans. In fall of 2015, we extended these efforts with the launch of free Military Family Programs that welcome active military families looking for an opportunity to explore the city, recently returned veterans seeking a way to spend time and reconnect with family, older veterans sharing their military experience with grandchildren for the first time, and Gold Star Families looking for positive experiences after loss. At the same time, we started offering free tours to a PTS peer support group at the Bronx VA, and we now offer free tours to any NYC-based veterans' organization. We soon expanded to offering Intrepid After Hours, evening programs exclusively for current and former service members, with behind-the-scenes opportunities, veteran-led creative workshops, catered dinner and plenty of bonding across branches, service eras and post-service experiences. We now also offer special Veterans Plus programs, including film screenings, performances, a Pride event, and now a book club, for veterans and their guests. And we offer Vet Video Chats -- interactive, live tours over video chat -- for veterans (local and far away) otherwise unable to visit the Museum. Last November, we hosted our first-ever Veterans Jobs & Resource Fair, which also featured workshops on networking, resume writing and other skills. We've benefited from staff trainings led by experts at the NYU Langone's Cohen Military Family Center and the NY-Presbyterian Military Family Wellness Center, and from the advice and feedback of our standing Council of Veteran Advisers.

Through this all, we have developed a close and fruitful relationship with DVS. We were honored to be the venue for the signing of the bill that officially created DVS, out of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, and also to be the venue for the recent announcement of the transition from Commissioner Sutton to Commissioner Hendon. Since we started our Council of Veteran Advisers, we have always had a veteran representative of DVS on the council, sharing feedback on program ideas and connecting us with resources. Both commissioners and their staff have been responsive to our questions and ideas, and have shared our programs via their e-newsletter and social media. They have been advocates for the important role cultural organizations and the arts can and should play in the lives of veterans and their families and in serving as foundations for community, which we agree with and greatly appreciate. DVS and the City Council's recognition of how cultural experiences can strengthen veteran communities and encourage personal growth has been instrumental in the expansion and deepening of the Intrepid Museum's programs and participants over the years, and I know other museums are taking notice.

We believe DVS is a critical agency for all of these reasons. We are hopeful it continues to be adequately funded and managed in order that it can continue to have the proper resources to help serve our veterans and other organizations that serve veterans, as collective programming matures. Thank you.

# Veterans Mental Health Coalition of NYC

administered by



## Committee on Veterans

### Chair:

Chaim M. Deutsch

### Members:

Paul A. Vallone  
Mathieu Eugene,  
Alicka Ampy-Samuel  
Alan N. Maisel

**T2019-5578 Oversight – The Future of DVS**

**January 21, 2020**

Testimony by:

Joe Hunt

Director – Veterans Mental Health Coalition of NYC

Thank you, Chairman Deutsch, and members of the Committee on Veterans, for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the future of NYC's Department of Veterans' Service. My name is Joe Hunt, I am a U.S. Army Veteran and I serve as Director of the Veterans Mental Health Coalition of New York City (VMHC). The VMHC is a coalition of nearly 900 members, representing 388 organizations that support the military-connected community in New York City. The VMHC is administered by Vibrant Emotional Health (Vibrant), formerly known as the Mental Health Association of New York City.

For the past four years, the VMHC has made the point in all of our testimony to City Council Committees on Veterans and on Mental Health, and in meetings with DVS, that nearly half (44%) of all service members returning to civilian life in New York State return with psychological injuries and/or substance use issues. Yet, only one-third ever seek treatment<sup>1</sup>.

For those who have not served in the military, it may be surprising to learn that another factor affecting the emotional well-being of Veterans is transitioning back to civilian life. They are leaving supportive communities built upon a rigorous regimen and established supports and are basically cut loose to fend for themselves upon separation from the military. Jim McDonough, Director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services, once compared transitioning to becoming homeless and unemployed, all at once.

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<sup>1</sup> A Needs Assessment of New York State Veterans Final Report to the New York State Health Foundation. Source: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR920.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR920.html)

There are two primary reasons why Veterans are unable to adequately address their behavioral and emotional health needs. First, despite increased efforts to reduce the stigma associated with mental health treatment, the stigma remains considerable.

Second, the need for other types of services are often at the top of Veterans' priorities. A report from the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), which oversees VetConnectNYC, and coordination centers in 6 other states, indicated that the most frequently requested services were: 1) Housing; 2) Employment; and 3) Benefits Navigation. These services accounted for 49% of all requests. Only 1% of the nearly 65,000 requests were for Mental Health and Substance Use services. Based on these statistics, coupled with the understanding that only one-third of Veterans with mental health or substance use disorders seek treatment, it is reasonable to extrapolate that approximately 67 out of every 100 Veterans who have clinically significant behavioral health needs are initially seeking services from non-mental health providers.

Non-mental health providers are an important gateway to connecting Veterans to behavioral health services, when appropriate. And, early intervention is our best opportunity to reduce deaths by suicide among our brothers and sisters who have served in the military.

Vibrant and the VMHC supported the creation of the New York City Department of Veterans Services (DVS) to meet the needs of New York City's estimate 210,808 Veterans, National Guard and reservists<sup>2</sup>. And, VMHC supported DVS's comprehensive approach to addressing mental health and emotional well-being through its Core4 Whole

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<sup>2</sup> NYC DVS "[Facts & Stats](#)"

Health Model. The Core4 model provided a framework for understanding how members of the military-connected community could use various types of service options to address their behavioral health needs without solely being reliant on clinical treatment.

And, the VMHC applauded the acquisition of VetConnectNYC by DVS.

VetConnectNYC is a valuable resource for information and referrals that link New York City's military-connected community to an array of service providers across a wide variety of sectors. To maximize the potential that VetConnectNYC holds requires increased community awareness of its service and the inclusion of more, qualified service providers.

VetConnectNYC's enormous value cannot be overstated. Today, most of the research we see from the VA and elsewhere is at least two years old. VetConnectNYC's ability to collect and report timely information about the number of requests and types of services requested, and the source of the requests and referrals is invaluable. Armed with this information, DVS and community-based providers will be better able to respond to the demand for different types of services, better understand the types of clients requesting services and develop strategies for early intervention and the reduction in deaths by suicide.

The VMHC holds out great hopes for the new Commissioner, James Hendon, and the DVS Team. But hope is not enough. We would like to see DVS:

- Publicly communicate its goals and regularly report on the key performance indicators it uses to track its performance;
- Work more collaboratively with community providers to achieve these goals;

- Recruit and on-board more qualified service providers in the VetConnectNYC network to enhance its value and benefit to the community;
- Actively encourage VetConnectNYC providers to make all Behavioral Health referrals through the VetConnectNYC network and
- Establish a concerted communications campaign to ensure New York City's military-connected community is aware of the types of services available through VetConnectNYC.

Thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony today. We are grateful for the New York City Council having made this opportunity possible, and we are available at the Council's convenience to assist in its efforts to support the emotional well-being of New York City's Veteran community.



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL VETERANS COMMITTEE**

**“THE FUTURE OF DVS”**

**January 21, 2020 1 P.M.**

Good afternoon Chairman Deutsch and good afternoon to the honorable members of this committee. My name is Kent Eiler and I’m the Project Director of the City Bar Justice Center’s Veterans Assistance Project. The Justice Center is part of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York Fund, Inc., (“City Bar Fund”), the public service affiliate of the City Bar. Our mission is to leverage the resources of the New York City legal community to increase access to justice through pro bono volunteer lawyers.

Since the beginning of the city’s Department of Veterans Service (“DVS”) in FY 2017, veterans and their service providers have watched the nascent city agency with tremendous hope. People have understood that the footprint of DVS, with its annual budget of a little over five million dollars, couldn’t begin to compare with the \$1.7 billion annual footprint in the city from the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”) but it was never expected DVS would compare or compete with the feds. Instead, the hope, and the reason so many veterans advocates supported the creation of DVS, was the belief that this relatively small, nimble new agency would be able to closely consult with the city’s veterans and service providers to identify how the city could best identify gaps in services and meet the needs of the city’s veterans in light of those gaps.

At the federal level, leadership at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has long been criticized for being aloof. The rap on the VA is that, far too often, it proscribes policies that fail

because those policies are informed by political appointees as opposed to primarily being concerned with efficacy, inputs from subject matter experts, and the needs of the veterans whom the VA is tasked to serve. The VA, for decades, has been burdened by the well-intentioned ideas from long-ago departed political appointees. All too often, when seeking a dialogue, veterans and their advocates are subject to a one-way conversation where it's the VA that does all the talking. It was vital when DVS was created and remains vital today that DVS avoid recreating at the local level the problems veterans can experience at the federal level with the VA.

It's vital that DVS not be aloof and be engaged with the city's veterans community. DVS's size and budget mean that, to be effective, it must, prior to proscribing policy, consult with service providers and subject matter experts to learn what services are being provided to veterans to avoid unnecessary duplication of existing services. Recently DVS announced an upcoming event on February 6 where it will discuss with community partners its "2020 strategic plan and vision for supporting veterans and their families in the future." This is a welcome development. At the February 6 event and events like it in the future it will be important for DVS leadership to listen to community partners about what DVS priorities should be.

With the realities of finite resources, it is vital that DVS demonstrate it is a good steward of the city's taxpayers' monies. DVS must relentlessly examine what it is doing and discard that which is not working while embracing what is working while continuing to seek further efficiencies. At present, the VA's \$1.7 billion annual footprint in New York City shrinks every year as does the number of veterans in the city. According to the VA's National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, the VA's fiscal footprint in New York City shrunk by more than \$25 million dollars from FY 17 to FY18.<sup>1</sup> DVS should consider adopting, as part of its

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<sup>1</sup> See National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics "Expenditures" FY18 and FY 17 available at <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp>.

mission, plans on how to address this federal fiscal tide leaving New York to the extent it can. One way this committee helps to stem that fiscal tide is through its Veterans Legal Initiative. The City Bar Justice Center's Veterans Assistance Project is pleased to be included as part of that initiative. The mission of the City Bar Justice Center's Veterans Assistance Project is making sure veterans have competent legal counsel to ensure the VA is paying veterans the compensation and benefits they have earned through their military service. Despite the VA's \$1.7 billion annual footprint across the five boroughs today, not a penny of that \$1.7 billion from the feds is outlayed towards veterans-focused legal services due to present legal limitations the VA has placed on the funding of legal services. While more certainly can and should be done at both the city and state level, the Veterans Legal Initiative is one example of the city identifying a gap in services and taking steps to try to mitigate that gap.<sup>2</sup> By embracing an approach of engagement with the city's veterans' community, of demanding efficiencies, and a commitment to rooting out service gaps, DVS will have before it a new, exciting, prosperous future.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> See Report of the Military Affairs & Justice, Disability Law, and Social Welfare Committees of the New York City Bar Association on the Inadequate Financial Support for Legal Services for Veterans Seeking Benefits available at <https://www.nycbar.org/member-and-career-services/committees/reports-listing/reports/detail/report-on-the-inadequate-financial-support-for-legal-services-for-veterans-seeking-benefits>.

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: January 21, 2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jacoby + Butler

Address: 85 Broad Street NY, NY 10004

I represent: Viet + Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

Address: Same as above

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vincent Garcia

Address: 1 Centre Street

I represent: DVS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: James Henderson

Address: 1 Centre Street

I represent: DVS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Joe Vitale

Address: 270 E 42nd Street

I represent: VIVISNY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Eric Rosenbaum

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: 4 Kra Project Renewal

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Amanda Kraus

Address: Eric Rosenbaum

I represent: Row New York

Address: Project Renewal

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 1/21/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: William Alvarez

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Dow New York

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: James Fitzgerald

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Veterans Alliance

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 1/21/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: COCO CULHANE

Address: Liberty St.

I represent: VETERAN ADVOCACY PROJECT

Address: LIBERTY ST.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 1/21/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Charlotte Martin

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum

Address: W 46th St. & 12th Ave, New York NY 10036

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joe Hunt

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 1/21/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sam Skane

Address: 100 William St 20th Fl

I represent: New York County Defender Services (NYCDS)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 1/21/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Peter Kemper

Address: 40 Worth St. NY, NY 1003

I represent: Volunteers of Legal Service

Address: 40 Worth St. NY, NY 1003

*Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms*

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. DVS Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kent Eiler

Address: 42 West 44th Street NYC 10036

I represent: City Bar Justice Center

Address: 42 West 44th Street NYC 10036

*Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms*