

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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January 21, 2020

Start: 1:05 p.m.

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm, 16th
Fl.

B E F O R E: Chaim M. Deutsch,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alicka Ampry-Samuel

Mathieu Eugene

Alan N. Maisel

Paul A. Vallone

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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A P P E A R A N C E S

James Hendon
Commissioner for the New York City Department of
Veterans Services or DVS

Vincent Garcia
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs and
Ombudsman at DVS

James Fitzgerald
Deputy Director for NYC Veterans Alliance

Joe Vitti
Supervisor for the Visiting Nurse Service of New
York's Veterans Hospice Program

Jeremy Butler
Navy Veteran currently serving Navy Reservist and
Chief Executive Officer of Iraq and Afghanistan

Eric Rosenbaum
President and CEO or Project Renewal on New York
City Homeless Services Nonprofit Agency

Amanda Kraus
Founder and CEO of Row New York

William Alvarez
Row New York Veteran

Kent Eiler
Project Director of the City Bar Justice Center
as Veterans Assistance Project

Peter Kempner
Legal Director at Volunteers of Legal Service

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Sam Sloane
Public Defender with the New York County Defender
Services

Coco Culhane
Executive Director of the Veteran Advocacy
Project

Charlotte Martin
Intrepid, Sea, Air & Space Museum

Joe Hunt
U.S. Army Veteran and Director of the Veterans
Mental Health Coalition of New York City

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [GAVEL] Good afternoon,
3 I'm Council Member Chaim Deutsch; Chair of Committee
4 on Veterans. Thank you all for joining us today. I
5 would like to especially thank the members of the
6 Armed Forces who protect our way of living and all of
7 the freedoms we are afforded. I would also like to
8 extend a warm welcome to the new Commissioner of DVS,
9 James Hendon. So, welcome Commissioner, I look
10 forward to working with you in ensuring that the
11 veterans and their family members are adequately
12 served within New York City.

13 Today's hearing is an important one and one on
14 the future of DVS. DVS is now approaching its fourth
15 year of existence. With a new Commissioner, it is
16 important to examine what the agency has done and
17 what it intends to do in the future.

18 What started as the Office of Mayoral of Veterans
19 Affairs MOVA, was just a small office with four
20 employees in 2015 through the passage of Local Law
21 113. MOVA became DVS and today DVS is a standalone
22 independent municipal agency with over 40 staff
23 members. DVS currently provides programs and
24 services in four main areas.

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2 One, engagement and client services to ensure
3 that veterans gain access to and have knowledge to
4 navigate educational programs, find jobs and create
5 their own business opportunities.

6 Two, housing to ensure that their housing and
7 social services resources are available to veterans
8 and their families.

9 Three, Vets ThriveNYC to ensure that health
10 services for veterans are provided and Four, careers,
11 which connect veterans with resources they need to
12 succeed professionally.

13 In it's first three years, DVS has helped
14 veterans in a number of ways including housing
15 homeless veterans, helping veterans with PTSD, to
16 find employment, prevent care program and creating a
17 comprehensive mental health training program.

18 As of November 1, 2019, DVS has a new
19 Commissioner, Commissioner James Hendon serving in a
20 number of previous roles including as Director of NYU
21 Veterans Future Lab, CEO of Energy Economic
22 Development Corporation, and CEO of Black Power.
23 Commissioner Hendon comes to DVS having worked with
24 our city's veterans.
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2 In addition to his civilian titles, Commissioner
3 Hendon spent years in the U.S. Army as an active duty
4 Infantry Officer being deployed as a Mortar Platoon
5 Leader and Battalion Public Affairs Officer to Iraq
6 in 2015. Working as Admissions Officer for West
7 point from 2006-2007 and serving as a senior advisor
8 to the Afghan border in Afghanistan from 2007-2009.
9 In addition to these accolades, he has also served as
10 a Mayoral appointee under an 11 member New York City
11 Advisory Board and is currently a drilling U.S. Army
12 Reservist Lieutenant Colonel acting as a New York
13 City leader of the 75th Innovation Command.

14 The Committee welcomes Commissioner Hendon and
15 looks forward to hearing what his vision for DVS and
16 for our City's Veterans Community is going forward.
17 As DVS enters its fourth year in 2020 with an
18 expanded staff of over 40 staff members, a budget of
19 \$4.6 million and a new Commissioner. The Committee
20 on Veterans would like to have a public conversation
21 with the agency, meant to help our veterans. We
22 would like to know what DVS has done and what
23 challenges it has faced and what it has learned from
24 those challenges. We would like to learn more about
25 the new Commissioners mission and vision moving

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2 forward and whether there are any fundamental shifts
3 in operational and management and what if anything
4 the agency will be doing to address the issues this
5 Committee has already examined during our hearings
6 over the past four years. And how DVS plans to reach
7 its goals of better serving veterans in New York
8 City.

9 We also want to hear from advocates and members
10 of the public and tell us what you want to see from
11 DVS these areas where you think DVS should be making
12 changes, improving or remaining the same.

13 I would also like to acknowledge my Veterans
14 Committee, not here yet, and in addition, I would
15 like to thank my Committee staff Nuzhat Chowdhury,
16 Kevin Kotowski, Sara Liss, Peter Butler and John
17 Russell as well as my citywide Veterans Director Joe
18 Bello for their help and with this hearing. I also
19 want to give a shout out to my Deputy Chief of Staff,
20 who didn't put her name here for a reason. Tova
21 Chatzinoff, thank you very much.

22 And I just want to just tell you a little story.
23 just a few days ago, I was honored at this school,
24 private school and not in my district and they chose
25 to honor me and you know, I accepted a few months

1
2 ago. So, as I went up to the podium the MC came over
3 to me and said, you know why we want to honor you?
4 Do you know why we decided to honor you, because you
5 have - I was around the corner from 250 Broadway and
6 every time I see homeless person out in the street,
7 the first thing is I walk over and I ask that
8 individual if they're a veteran, because we all know
9 that we have many resources for veterans and if he or
10 she is not a veteran, than I call 3-1-1 and I call
11 Breaking Ground to come down and I wait then until
12 they come down, they mandated to respond within an
13 hour.

14 So, I was around the corner from City Hall and he
15 saw me speaking to a homeless person for about 20
16 minutes and he came over and took a photo of me and I
17 remember that photo because when I turned around, I
18 saw the guy running away because I was going to chase
19 him and he said, I was just impressed that no one was
20 around, it wasn't a photo op and you went there and
21 you were talking to the homeless person. So, I just
22 want to tell the advocates and everyone listening,
23 how important it is when you see a homeless person
24 outside on the street, especially in the weather as
25 today where it's really cold outside or even during

1
2 the summer. Anytime you see a homeless person,
3 please always make sure to approach and if he or she
4 is a veteran, you could reach out to DVS, you could
5 reach out to my office and we'll make sure that we'll
6 send someone over right away. And if it's not a
7 veteran, if he or she is not a veteran, just make the
8 call to 3-1-1, it will take an extra five minutes or
9 ten minutes of your time to make that call.

10 And it's extremely important to reach out because
11 we all know that you can not force a homeless person
12 to go into shelter but having conversations with
13 people living on the streets is extremely important
14 because then they feel that we care, someone cares
15 about them and hopefully, eventually, if it's not
16 that day, hopefully, the next day or the next week,
17 or the next month that that person goes into shelter
18 and please, I just want to tell, I know the advocates
19 do an amazing job when it comes to homelessness but I
20 want to just send this message out to all the people
21 who are watching this hearing at this time.

22 So, with that being said, I want to acknowledge
23 one of my colleagues who is here, Alicka Ampry-Samuel
24 whose husband is a veteran, right and she's been a
25 strong advocate and she also just joined not to long

1
2 ago. She joined the Veterans Committee and so, I
3 want to thank you and thank your husband. I had an
4 opportunity to meet him, for everything that he has
5 done in giving us our freedom.

6 So, I would like to ask the Council now to
7 administer the oath.

8 COUNCIL CLERK: Please raise your right hand. Do
9 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and
10 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this
11 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
12 questions?

13 PANEL: I do.

14 COUNCIL CLERK: Thank you.

15 JAMES HENDON: Before we get any remarks, I want
16 to also recognize the Chair and the Committee members
17 as far as those who are here and those who are not.
18 Chair Deutsch, Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel and
19 an absent chair, Council Member Paul Vallone, Council
20 Member Mathieu Eugene, Council Member Alan Maisel and
21 I want to also echo what the Council Member said in
22 the public record as far as just emphasizing outreach
23 to our homeless to those who are in housing
24 insecurity. Veteran or not, that we all should do

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2 our part to help these people. So, I definitely echo
3 those sentiments.

4 Good morning Chairman Deutsch, Members of the
5 Committee and advocates. Thank you for convening
6 today's hearing. My name is James Hendon and I'm
7 proud to serve as the Commissioner for the New York
8 City Department of Veterans Services or DVS.

9 I'm joined today by Vincent Garcia, Director of
10 Intergovernmental Affairs and Ombudsman at DVS.
11 First, I would like to wish you all a happy New Year.
12 As we move into this next year of live, we also
13 embark on the exiting journey of a new chapter for
14 this agency. As we refit and retool our future, for
15 the future, we will continue to provide the services
16 and offerings that assist our constituency while
17 developing innovative and invaluable offerings to
18 better connect and serve our veterans. It is our
19 goal in entering this new chapter to continue taking
20 an active approach in improving the economic
21 development, wellness and housing security for our
22 veterans, families, caregivers and survivors.

23 As always, DVS staff members are proud to meet
24 Council Members at our veterans resource centers to
25 maintain our ongoing collaborations to better the New

1
2 York City Veteran Community. Since 2016, DVS has
3 experienced tremendous growth. Initially occupying a
4 space in the Mayor's Office. We have evolved into a
5 team of over 40 employees and growing. Since our
6 inception, we have tackled some of the most dire
7 situations facing our more vulnerable veterans,
8 including homelessness and mental health.

9 As we maintained our commitment to that goal, we
10 have actively begun to include a handful of programs
11 and services to address a number of other concerns
12 facing veterans and their families in New York City
13 such as service to service and pay for success. In
14 looking back, the experience of the last few years
15 has helped us see the opportunities for improvement
16 to better serve our constituency and the growth that
17 comes along with it.

18 With a committed staff and enthusiastic
19 commissioner, DVS began a revolutionary undertaking
20 to become the first local municipal agency to handle
21 veteran issues and being the first to complete
22 anything at this level within the country. There
23 were a number of successes in areas that needed
24 improvement and entering this agency at this current
25 time, I've been fortunate to reflect and understand

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2 that while great work has been done, we need to do
3 more.

4 First, we learned that there is no substitute for
5 boots on the ground or in person connections.

6 Veterans and the number of subgroups we serve include
7 the elderly, students, family members, LGBTQ persons,
8 women, those transitioning from service or even those
9 now just entering the service. Each requires a
10 unique diverse and personal approach that technology
11 alone cannot solve. In reflecting upon those people
12 whom we have reached and understanding the need to
13 expand our reach. DVS commits itself to not only
14 target the aforementioned groups but strive in
15 providing them with a face and body in leu of just an
16 agency name and contact.

17 Next, DVS has done a phenomenal job of assisting
18 those in distressful situations like homelessness.

19 Under the leadership of the former Commissioner
20 Sutton, DVS, our sister agencies like the Department
21 of Homeless Services, the Mayor's Office and City
22 Council Veterans Committee have been able to
23 drastically reduce veteran homelessness numbers
24 despite the uptick in homelessness in the overall
25 city population.

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2 Most recently, DVS reported a veteran homeless
3 head count of 690. Five less than the previous year
4 point and time count. Yet, while we're still
5 committed to ensuring that every veteran has a
6 security of a place to rest their head safely at
7 night, our outreach to those not within the most
8 vulnerable of populations such as young working
9 professionals, middle class families and those
10 looking to purchase a home is an area of opportunity.

11 Therefore, in entering this next chapter, we will
12 focus our efforts towards engaging the larger market
13 share veterans while maintain our commitments to more
14 vulnerable members of our community. As we enter
15 this new chapter, DVS is actively working on
16 developing a meaningful and innovative policy
17 measures to empower, improve and inform veterans of
18 the economic opportunities and benefits available to
19 them throughout all levels of government.

20 Further, as an agency we commit ourselves to
21 better the overall wellbeing of our veterans, whether
22 financial, mental, emotional or otherwise. All the
23 while empowering, preserving and/or maintaining
24 housing opportunity. While this journey may not be
25 easy, it is critical for our veterans. To begin

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2 meeting this goal, we are holding a partnership
3 convening event on February 6th to begin the initial
4 steps in listening, learning and engaging with our
5 community on a deeper level. Invitations were also
6 sent to each Committee Council Member along with
7 Citywide Veterans Director Mr. Joseph Bello.

8 We hope to see you all in attendance for this
9 phenomenal event. To be able to best assist the
10 constituency that we serve, we first must begin to
11 examine our internal agency operations. As we began
12 this phase shortly after my arrival, DVS presently is
13 undergoing a reconfiguration into three teams;
14 current operations, future operations and
15 administration. Through this reconfiguration, DVS
16 can maintain its present commitments to our
17 constituents within our current operations team.
18 That can include housing homeless veterans,
19 conducting targeted outreach within the community and
20 engaging organizations, nonprofits and veterans
21 service organizations to get the word out.

22 Under future operations, DVS staff will develop
23 strategic and data focused initiatives to better ones
24 future. Once future operations finalizes the policy
25

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2 proposal, that final product will then move to the
3 current operations team to execute.

4 Lastly, to provide each group with a solid
5 foundation to complete their work is the
6 administration. This can include notable tasks such
7 as payroll, HR, to even larger ones like our
8 Intergovernmental Affairs Director and General
9 Council to shepherd the work to completion, such as
10 reviewing a document for legal clarity and/or
11 reviewing proposals and their feasibility with the
12 number of partners involved.

13 Next, we will bring those boots to the ground.
14 Under our reconfiguration of current operations, DVS
15 will continue to maintain a presence in each borough
16 but expand its reach with dedicated teams focused on
17 the needs of particular subgroups. Whether they are
18 LGBTQ students, utilizing some form of GI bill or
19 those interested in entrepreneurship. DVS will
20 expand its reach, broaden our community and through
21 that, empower and inform these individuals.

22 Lastly, we seek to assist in the creation of long
23 lasting generation well for our veterans. Most
24 notably, since World War II, the veteran community
25 and the GI bill has been an invaluable tool in

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2 uplifting people into the middle class and providing
3 opportunities to do so. While there is an array of
4 benefits afforded, being able to navigate the ever
5 changing field of benefits and being aware of those
6 changes has prevented many veterans from accessing
7 them.

8 Therefore, it is not only our goal to help our
9 constituents access these benefits, but to empower
10 them with the knowledge to make informed, strategic
11 decisions that benefit them and their families for
12 generations to come.

13 As DVS continues its upward trajectory into this
14 next chapter, we will continue to expand on the work
15 we've done thus far as we seek new endeavors.

16 We thank you for the opportunity to testify on
17 this matter and we look forward to addressing some of
18 the topics discussed in the coming months. We're
19 happy to answer any questions that the Committee may
20 have.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you Commissioner.
23 So, you've been involved with DVS as an advocate.
24 What steps do you believe needs to be changed or what
25 services you believe needs to be enhanced?

1
2 c Thank you for that question Commissioner. The
3 way I look at it is you know; we take this by
4 priorities first as far as the buckets for all of
5 this. First priority being outreach, just making
6 sure that we have a strong relationship with the
7 210,000 veterans in this community. All is for not
8 if we don't have that touch point with our people.
9 That's number one. Next priority is economic
10 empowerment, I often use the analogy in the office
11 that this is bell curve that we are attending to, not
12 just the left and right tails of it. In other words,
13 what can we do if we look at all of our veterans in
14 the community to move that entire bell curve to the
15 right and you know, what is available that we can
16 make sure that our people know of and what
17 initiatives can we lead or are currently leading to
18 kind of Stuart that.

19 Another piece of it is housing security. I feel
20 like housing security is separate from economic
21 empowerment because it's about a hierarchy of needs
22 point, as far as having a roof over ones head. You
23 start talking about those who are homeless and how we
24 can help them. This is step one, we can't do anything
25 until we triage that for our veterans.

1
2 And housing security also includes things not
3 just what we see on its face, like the homeless but
4 also things like when a veteran passes away and may
5 not have the means for that final resting place. How
6 do we account for that? So, that's bucketed within
7 it and last but not least, is culture. What binds us
8 is as a tribe so to speak, is that we have this
9 shared culture and these shared values and to make
10 sure that we're paying attention to that. Be it
11 through certain things that you know, like the
12 parades and the various events that are already
13 supported through this Council, to things that
14 involve you know, say memorials or monuments or
15 things along those lines. How are we culturally
16 coming together within our group and then what
17 undergirds all of this is mental health piece. As
18 far as wellbeing and what are we doing to help people
19 help themselves get to a better level with the battle
20 within one's mind, as I said at the intrepid a few
21 months ago.

22 So, once again, the priorities for me, number one
23 is outreach. Number two is economic empowerment.
24 Number three is housing security. Number four is

1
2 culture and then, you know, what undergirds all of
3 this is wellbeing.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. What is your
5 plan on reducing veteran homelessness? I mean, I
6 have seen you know, I went around to different
7 veterans supportive housing and as well as the Walden
8 Avenue, the veteran, they have veteran homelessness
9 and a lot of times when there are housing available
10 and there is housing available, it takes time before
11 the veteran moves into permanent housing. It could
12 be because of bureaucratic red tape. It could be
13 because the paperwork is just sitting. So, what is
14 your plan to better work together with the veteran
15 homeless shelters and to streamline the process of
16 getting the veterans into housing, into permanent
17 housing.

18 In addition to that, I have also seen that when a
19 veteran passes away, sometimes that apartment becomes
20 vacant if we wait too long. Whether they have to
21 wait for the NYPD to open up that apartment to give
22 the okay to rent it out or if there's a family
23 member, they have to wait for the public
24 administrator to come in and to give the okay to open
25 that apartment. So, what's your plans on working

1
2 together with the public administrator and with the
3 NYPD and with the shelters to make sure that that
4 process is streamlined is where we get the veteran
5 straight into housing, permanent housing as quick as
6 possible.

7 JAMES HENDON: I want to make sure I've got this.
8 So, first piece is you know, how we're looking at
9 reducing our homeless number, that's the first thing.
10 Next piece is, how are we going to tie in with the
11 administrators and the entire apparatus that deals
12 with you know, housing folks. That's first.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes.

14 JAMES HENDON: So, going back to the bell curve
15 analogy; one piece of this is to work within this
16 community that deals with housing security such that
17 we can preempt these issues. So, to try to have a
18 better touch point around the entire bell curve. So,
19 thing about someone who is in this bell curve who is
20 slipping from the middle, who's slipping towards the
21 left towards being in a position where they are in
22 this crisis point and this goes back to the current
23 operations, the future operations and administrative
24 ways that we break things down now.

1
2 So, for current operations, in the legacy in the
3 prior administration, the housing and supportive
4 services line was its own entity. Think of it as an
5 island within DVS that worked on these issues and it
6 did it great. They did outstanding work with it.
7 What we're doing now is streamlining, so that what we
8 used to call our traditional engagement community
9 service line and what we call our housing and
10 supportive services line are in the same group within
11 current operations.

12 Also, our constituent services falls under
13 current operations as well. So, we have all these
14 things together to try to get to a one plus one
15 equals three dynamic. Where it's not just one
16 independent group that's trying to handle these
17 issues, but that they've got touch points with the
18 other groups within as far as what's going on in the
19 ground.

20 So, for us, we're hoping the goal here is to
21 leverage economies of scale by having all of our
22 people as one team, one fight on these issues that
23 involve direct touches with our people in real time.
24 That's one aspect of it. The future operations team
25 is the group that would help deal with issues such as

1
2 what you mentioned as far as the public admin aspect.
3 You talked about a policy issue at the end of the
4 day, as far as things that government can do to make
5 sure that these processes move more smoothly, more
6 fluently etc. And so, by re-organizing ourselves we
7 have a team that is focused on these types of
8 discussions. We want to have the fire power do I
9 say, to be able to enter these arguments and to make
10 them effectively, so we can try to close these
11 timelines and make things more at ease on the housing
12 piece.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, with the 2020 being
14 the Census here, what's your plans on the agency
15 discussing or looking to do in terms of helping to
16 identify the veterans living throughout the five
17 boroughs?

18 JAMES HENDON: This is bigger than the Census
19 question. This goes to a larger question of how are
20 we doing outreach period. How are we touching
21 members of our community and a major shift for us is
22 to go from having a geographic footprint to it,
23 approach of you know, you've got the Bronx, you've
24 got Brooklyn, you've got Staten Island, you've got
25 Manhattan, etc., to more of a demographic approach.

1
2 Where we say you know, this is your portfolio, so
3 that we can meet our constituents on that demographic
4 line as opposed to on a geographic line.

5 So, it's still about promoting the efforts to
6 make sure that we get the word out with Census and
7 make sure we're counted but instead of it being
8 broken by five boroughs for the constituency we're
9 looking at right now, demographically the thirteen,
10 and forgive me, I'm going to try to rattle them off.
11 We've got Student Veterans; we have as a
12 constituency. We have those who are currently still
13 serving, so guard, reserve, active duty who work here
14 in New York City. We have our female veterans, we
15 have LGBTQ veterans, we have veterans who are facing
16 housing insecurity, so most of that being our
17 homeless population. We also have veterans who live
18 in public housing. We have those who are leadership
19 for our veteran service organizations. We have those
20 who reflect leadership within the mental health
21 community. We have veterans who are seniors, we have
22 veterans who are the caregivers, survivors and family
23 members of our cohort. We also have veterans who are
24 parents. We have veterans who, give me a second, it
25 will come to me. Our working professionals in the

1
2 public sector and veterans who are working
3 professionals in the private sector.

4 So, it's really about the flavor of outreach to
5 try to increase the amount of touches we have on
6 these issues. And one other thing I want to add to
7 this too is that, what we deal with when we talk
8 about the veteran community. While we say there are
9 210,000 in this city, what we don't know and we're
10 working to get an idea of is how many don't identify
11 as veterans. In other words, I've served but I no
12 longer really acknowledge my service for whatever
13 reason. It's something that is not the identity that
14 I really turn to when you talk about me. So, If I
15 can meet you at the identity that you currently do
16 operate in, for instance, let's say you are a working
17 professional in the public sector and we do the
18 outreach where we reach you through that, that's
19 another way for us to get you to kind of rejoin the
20 tribe so to speak. And so, this is why we're
21 shifting to this demographic footprint. We've got
22 210,000 people spread across 300 square miles in the
23 city and so, we feel like this is a better way to
24 begin to have this relationship.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, in the DVS's database,
3 we have an estimated of 200,000 veterans, how many
4 actually identified in New York City that DVS would
5 know exactly who they are?

6 JAMES HENDON: Forgive me, I know it's in our
7 Local Law 44 report, as far as the number there. I
8 know it was mentioned at one of the prior Council
9 meetings to as far as what the count is. I don't
10 want to represent; I know it's several thousand.
11 It's not cracked a 100,000 of the 210 but you know, I
12 believe 75 was a number that was pointed out at one
13 of the prior you know, Council meetings but there's a
14 difference between just having an email address and
15 having a relationship. And so, for us, it's really
16 about having that relationship, which means when we
17 let you know about things that are available to you
18 and opportunities, that you know, you respond and you
19 take advantage of these things.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, so, what's your plan
21 on expanding you know, getting information from those
22 210,000 veterans. Because in order to actually offer
23 them the services, we need to identify who they are.
24 So, do you have a plan on how you're going to expand
25

1
2 on the numbers of veterans you actually have contact
3 information on and how do you plan to do that?

4 JAMES HENDON: Well, for now, what we will do is
5 be sure to you know, you have to subscribe onto say,
6 a newsletter. So, it's not as simple as just taking
7 this information which we've obtained through the
8 government vehicle and saying okay, let's just push
9 something to you. You still have to opt into
10 receiving things from us.

11 And so, for us, we're hoping that as we start to
12 go from a push to a pull approach. In other words,
13 instead of us being in a situation where we're
14 constantly trying to look for people to tell them
15 about things, that they're seeking us out. That they
16 want to take advantage of the benefits of government.
17 That's a way to kind of bring them in the mix of
18 saying okay, I want to receive your newsletter. I
19 want to be able to access the podcast for DVS and
20 things like that.

21 So, for now, as far as of that group, it's a fine
22 line between having someone's information versus
23 automatically using it to do outreach in this way.

24

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I don't get it. So, how
3 would you like expand on that. Like, how would you
4 do outreach in order to -

5 JAMES HENDON: We want to look at the grass
6 topics of a grassroots approach Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Like, if Breaking Ground
8 goes out there and identifies a veteran, do they then
9 report it to DVS or does DVS work together with
10 Breaking Ground and to get the numbers of veterans,
11 because they are the ones who actually identify the
12 veterans out in the street.

13 So, do you plan on working together with Breaking
14 Ground because I'll tell you, the agencies, we have
15 so many agencies in New York City and it's very
16 unfortunate how they don't work together. There is
17 no partnership, almost zero partnership when it comes
18 to agencies working together. So, what is your plan
19 on bringing that partnership together especially
20 those agencies that have to do with veterans, those
21 who deal with veterans?

22 JAMES HENDON: We want to leverage a future
23 operation side of the house for that. So, when we
24 think current operations, think of people who are
25 physically working with our constituents in real

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2 time. The future operations side includes this
3 intergovernmental affairs piece or this outreach to
4 the grass tops, so to speak.

5 So, making sure we're tying in with different
6 veteran service organizations and with the Breaking
7 Grounds of the city. As far as the grass top
8 approach is, reach out to these groups and say hey,
9 here's what we have going on. Please feel free to
10 put the word out and as we, you know, hopefully
11 people will take us up on various offerings that we
12 have as far as I would see it Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, do you have the number
14 of how many veterans you actually identified out of
15 the 210,000? Do you have it there?

16 VINCENT GARCIA: Yes sir, we have 75,000 veterans
17 out of the 210,000 that we currently have some form
18 of correspondence with.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 75,000. So, how do you
20 follow up if there's a residence change or something
21 or if a veteran moves out of New York City or if a
22 veteran moves from one shelter to the next or one
23 supportive housing development to another one. How
24 do you follow up with that?

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2 VINCENT GARCIA: Well sir, what we do is we –
3 just, thank you for the question first off and what
4 we do is we always try to keep up the data. You
5 know, if there are within the pipeline especially for
6 our homeless services, there are those outreach
7 coordinators and individuals that have that
8 connection to the community and have that connection
9 towards the shelter and what not. To ensure that
10 where are these individuals transitioning, there is
11 still some point of contact and a warm hand off
12 that's passed on.

13 But I think also moving forward to what the
14 Commissioner's vision has is being able to further
15 that outreach demographic to ensure that when there
16 is a connection base upon DVS to that individual, it
17 doesn't end with that day. It's doesn't end with
18 that week; we continue to follow up with them. We
19 place that body and that individual versus in just
20 the agency and the mindset, to ensure that we're
21 always keeping up to date and we invite them to our
22 services and offerings and events that we're having.
23 Some to part to prevent that convenes on February
24 6th, to be able to further that communication,
25 further that environment that we're having with our

1
2 veterans that this is ongoing, it is collaborative
3 and there's a family and in doing so, we bring
4 everyone together.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: The 75,000, how long has
6 that been 75,000? Is it the last two years, three
7 years?

8 JAMES HENDON: These are legacy numbers. You
9 know, these are numbers that reflect the touches that
10 we've had since the birth of the organization of DVS.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, from day one, like do
12 you spot check. Like, do you make phone calls just
13 to make sure that those veterans are still living in
14 New York City. Those veterans may be not with us
15 today and just to make sure that we have - that the
16 75,000 is like a hard number of 75,000. How do you
17 spot check? How do you check that?

18 VINCENT GARCIA: There have been a number of
19 initiatives that have been through DVS where we have
20 reached out to the individuals that we've had on that
21 mailing list or that communication list that we have
22 per say.

23 So, in that for example, if there ever were a
24 physical mailings, we actually track the number that
25 would come in potentially of the return addresses and

1
2 trying to follow up in some way. So, there are
3 actions that are done to ensure that what our numbers
4 are and to increase those numbers. Increase those
5 communication aspects but what that full number is, I
6 won't be able to give you at this time, but I'm more
7 than happy to circle back in what that may or may not
8 look like.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do you know what the
10 numbers were like the previous year, now it's 75,000.
11 How many there were?

12 VINCENT GARCIA: I believe we're tracking around
13 the number of I think 56,000 or so comes to mind, but
14 I can follow up on what that number was and what the
15 improvement has been made from a years' time for
16 example.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How accurate, if you have
18 to take a guess, how accurate do you think that list
19 is like, percentagewise, like from the 75,000, how
20 many do you believe that the information you have is
21 like accurate. Would you say like 50 percent of the
22 list or 60 percent?

23 VINCENT GARCIA: I'm not really sure if giving an
24 exact accurate in a statistic number sir, but I think
25 that in the trustworthiness of it, I would say that's

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2 given the rating of good. But like anything else,
3 you always have to improve and make better and work
4 with what has been evolving withing the time space,
5 which DVS is actively doing so.

6 JAMES HENDON: And Chair, I just want to
7 underscore, what's complicated here is, it's deeper
8 than just how many names are on the list. It's you
9 know, what kind of touch points do we have with our
10 people and you know, the way that we're approaching
11 this for now is, if we have different initiative
12 where we have to deliver as far as making sure a
13 certain number of our veterans are taking advantage
14 of something. Are we able to meet those numbers?
15 Are we able to deliver to those things.

16 You know, so, we're very mindful of the list and
17 cultivating it and what not, but it's also just the
18 overall relationship is the undercurrent of it.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: What is the agencies plan
20 to address the various needs between different
21 veteran populations? For example, World War II vets
22 or the need of a veteran who served in Iraq or
23 Afghanistan? So, you have different needs of
24 different veterans that serve the county in different
25 ways. So, how do you address these different needs?

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2 JAMES HENDON: I feel like that goes to the
3 demographic outreach as far as often times these
4 things through conducting say, demographic outreach.

5 So, if you take that World War II era, that Korea
6 era veteran, than our person who has the seniors as a
7 portfolio, would likely have when the kick back. Not
8 just offerings that are specific to veterans but also
9 things that the Department of the Aging has at its
10 disposal here in the city. To make sure our people
11 know about that as an example.

12 Likewise, for someone whose a post 9-1-1 veteran,
13 who maybe in their 30's or 40's, maybe a working
14 professional, that's someone for whom their needs may
15 hit them as a parent as far as demographically or
16 them as a working professional in a public private
17 space.

18 So, we're trying to - the demographic outreach we
19 believe will be able to help us meet people where
20 they are with their issues and I have to acknowledge,
21 you know, Council Member Samuel as far as you know,
22 those were caregivers, survivors and spouses. So, we
23 can be able to meet them on the terms that things
24 that are valuable to them as well.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, from the 75,000, we'll
3 get back to the 75,000. For some reason, I'm like
4 focused on that. From the 75,000, do you know
5 exactly what the different veteran populations are
6 from that list that you currently have? What the
7 needs are, you know, the different needs that each
8 veteran might have. Which may be a little different
9 from one from the other?

10 VINCENT GARCIA: I agree with you sir and I think
11 what we're actually doing within that 75,000 number
12 is actually developing a marketing campaign for
13 outreach. As the Commissioner said to, not only
14 determine those subgroups and those demographics as
15 towards outreach, but also understanding what can we
16 do on our end as an agency but also working with our
17 sister agencies to get a better addressing of what
18 that population may be.

19 So, working with those city agencies that may
20 work for example with an older veteran population to
21 see what those needs are. What are the unique needs
22 that don't just go in a demographic of age per say,
23 it goes uniquely to that veteran demographic that
24 tend to be older.

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2 As I'm sure many of us here know, the Vietnam
3 Veteran population is our largest population within
4 the city and within those carry a number of Marriott
5 of unique needs that this marketing campaign could be
6 able to utilize and to address.

7 And moving forward, we are continuing our
8 partnership with city agencies to do so but also
9 actively developing this marketing campaign to really
10 be able to focus in and hone in on what those needs
11 maybe for those particular populations. On the
12 numbers that we currently have as well as the
13 outreach further to get a better holistic view.

14 JAMES HENDON: And I want to add to that to, as
15 far as the — for the Local Law 44 report, looking at
16 across the spectrum at the common needs. The common
17 themes that emerge are housing, are employment and
18 legal assistance are the common things that continue
19 to emerge and when we say legal assistance, I just
20 want to underscore that approximately 15 percent of
21 our veterans have less than honorable discharges and
22 are you know, seeking upgrades.

23 So, that's something else that you know, we're
24 currently pursuing as far as the discharge upgrade
25 issue.

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2 UNIDENTIFIED: 15 Percent?

3 JAMES HENDON: 15 percent, yeah.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, you know, in the
5 past, I've been trying to get information on the
6 veteran suicide rate here in New York City. The
7 number that people speak about in the United States
8 of America is now country is twenty per day and I
9 couldn't get anywhere previously with finding out to
10 see what the suicide rate is. This way we know what
11 more resources we need to put in and what more
12 outreach we need to do. What are your plans in order
13 to number one, to find out the numbers of veterans
14 suicide here in New York City and number two, do you
15 feel it's important for us to know in order to
16 understand you know, veterans who suffer from PTSD,
17 who just you know, one day to the next, it's just you
18 know, commit suicide.

19 JAMES HENDON: I'm tracking that in prior to
20 coming in, there have been discussions with the
21 medical examiners office as far as being able to
22 identify this type of information and working with
23 DOMH, the Department of Mental Health as well to try
24 to get a better handle on these things. I know this
25 is work that's in progress right now.

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2 As far as how do we deal with this, this also
3 goes back to the – it is parallel to the issue of
4 veterans who may not identify that they have served.
5 This other issue of you have folks for whom it's
6 about how we phrase these things and not maybe saying
7 things on the lines of mental health first aid or
8 mentioning specifically suicide by name but just
9 overall wellbeing. So, for us you'll see a shift in
10 how we communicate these things to our veterans just
11 to get them open to having these discussions by it
12 being a greater focus on wellbeing, which is
13 something that we're going to work with the Thrive
14 NYC Department on how we best get people to open up
15 and accept or put their hand up and say you know, I
16 could benefit from this help.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, Thrive NYC has been
18 criticized in the papers almost every week and do you
19 feel that the services that they currently have on
20 the mental health for veterans, do you think that is
21 successful? Do you think they are successful with
22 working with the veterans with the services that they
23 currently have?

24 JAMES HENDON: I think this ties back to us in
25 the relationship piece. In other words, when I look

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2 at Thrive, Thrive will say hey, we want to support
3 what gives outcomes and what works in this space.

4 For us to be able to you know, see what works, we
5 need to have better relationships with our people, so
6 that we can have more of our members of our community
7 embrace aspects of wellbeing so they can be able to
8 have informed decisions as far as what they are
9 investing in.

10 So, it's not about and this is speaking about how
11 the Thrive NYC works and it's really about, has our
12 outreach gotten to the point where we've got strong
13 enough touches with our people, so we know who is
14 taking advantage of what and what does work, what
15 does help with better outcomes.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Does DVS have the number of
17 how many veterans actually get services from Thrive?
18 Do you have those numbers?

19 JAMES HENDON: I don't have them.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Are there numbers?

21 VINCENT GARCIA: I can definitely circle back
22 with you sir. I can double check on our end and be
23 able to figure out what the numbers are.

24 JAMES HENDON: There are numbers, we can get it
25 to you. I know that there are numbers Chair.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so, if Thrive would
3 have the numbers that they report to DVS, how do you
4 do the outreach to those people who get the services
5 to determine if those services are being helpful to
6 those veterans? What are your plans to determine
7 that those services are sufficient for those
8 veterans.

9 JAMES HENDON: I think for us it will be still
10 working with our current operations team, those who
11 do that on the ground. Touches with our veterans to
12 just get that feedback as to as far as what works,
13 what doesn't work.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, you do feel it's
15 important to know the veterans suicide rate here in
16 New York City?

17 JAMES HENDON: Absolutely, yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so it's something
19 that you will have that information the next hearing
20 or two? I mean, it's something that you're working
21 on now.

22 VINCENT GARCIA: I can assure you Council Member
23 that this is actually something to determine that
24 we're actually actively working. I'm actually
25 spearheading the initiatives myself along with DOHMH and

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2 OCME to determine what those numbers look like, where
3 the population is and how best to really be able to
4 access that data to that point of being able you
5 know, wanting to know the numbers but I think to is
6 realistically, what can we as society or the people
7 do better for better. Those who are suffering from
8 mental illness and in first doing so, we have to
9 understand what do those individuals look like? What
10 are the tasks and standards that we're going to place
11 upon ourselves to be able to access and aid this
12 group, but in doing so, we have to know what they
13 look like, what their ages are, where they're from,
14 what is effecting them and that is something that us,
15 here in the DVS side, we take very seriously and
16 we're actively working with DOHMH to be able to get
17 in agreement forward to realize that data, push that
18 data out and creating a full change.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so, I'm looking
20 forward to if you have the information for the next
21 hearing. Number one is the suicide rate in New York
22 City and number two, if the services that Thrive is
23 currently giving to the veterans by doing outreach to
24 those individuals who are using the services to check
25 if these mental health resources have been helpful to

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2 them. Because if it's not, then they have no other
3 place to turn then it could be a problem. I mean, it
4 is a problem.

5 So, these are the two things. Exactly what you
6 just said, you just put them both together and I
7 think that's very important.

8 So, I'm going to go to my colleagues. Anyone
9 have questions? I want to acknowledge before that,
10 well, he left now, Mathieu Eugene and we're also
11 joined by Council Member Alan Maisel, thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Good afternoon
13 everyone and it's good to see you again Commissioner.
14 I just have three questions related to housing,
15 outreach and of course family support.

16 The first one with housing, are you at the table
17 at all in you meeting DVS with this administration,
18 the Mayor, with HPD or anyone else? We have a lot of
19 development that's happening throughout the city and
20 the conversation is always around units for our
21 extremely low and low income families and can we get
22 more units for seniors but what I really hear is, can
23 we get more units online with these developments for
24 veterans.

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2 And so, I'm just curious to know if you are at
3 the table at all with this administration as it
4 relates to -

5 JAMES HENDON: Yes, we are Council Member, we
6 are. As far as with Social Services and with folks
7 from NYCHA to on these issues as far as making sure
8 that we can - that the capacity is available for
9 members of our community. To the point of having
10 recurrent meetings with City Hall at that level so we
11 can get a handle on it. So, yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Because for me,
13 it's a matter of, we're in the budget season now and
14 we need to know what the ask is and if you are having
15 conversations, what does that look like. Like what
16 type of vouchers are readily available to the city
17 for our veteran families and individuals and what
18 should we be pushing for as a Council Member or body
19 within these development projects and to have that
20 information. If you're having conversations and we
21 know that there's opportunity there, what are we
22 pushing for and in our own individual budgets what
23 are we pushing for.

24 So, that information would be extremely helpful.
25 I know to me personally within my district and in

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2 addition to that, are you having those same
3 conversations with HUD, with vouchers they may have
4 available?

5 JAMES HENDON: So, yes, we are. I know we also
6 have that HUD-VASH continuum, which is like a hybrid
7 version of a HUD-VASH specific for veterans who are
8 in New York City, so we do have that. I can't speak
9 to the frequency; I know that for City Hall we have
10 occurring check ins on these things. As far as HUD,
11 it's an ongoing relationship in that we are very much
12 with them and I do hear what your saying as far as
13 you know, what does the ask look like as far as areas
14 where you know, places where you can advocate for
15 things as far as capacity for us for our members of
16 fatality and security. I do receive that message, I
17 just want to say, so we can get back to you on it.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay, and last with
19 the housing piece, the reason why I'm mentioning that
20 is because as the Chair of the Public Housing
21 Committee and having conversations around public
22 housing. If you're having conversations related to
23 NYCHA and lists, the fact that I don't know that is a
24 bit problematic or could be problematic. And I'm
25 having conversations with HUD about domestic

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2 violence, housing opportunities and again, what's
3 happening with public housing and Section 8 and my
4 own personal conversations with the HUD
5 representatives related to VASH and everything else
6 and so, if you're having those conversations, I think
7 it would be helpful for us to have that conversation
8 together. And so, if you're at the table, you can
9 shoot me an email or something and say, hey, Alicka,
10 would it be helpful if your in on this meeting or
11 provide me with the information, so I can know how to
12 push. So that's with housing.

13 With the outreach piece of it.

14 JAMES HENDON: Thank you by the way. Thank you
15 for that.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: With the outreach
17 piece, you mentioned direct touches and I've said
18 this in previous hearings. When I am at the VA
19 hospital with my husband or I'm at a meeting with him
20 at the DAVE Office, I do not see the presence at all
21 of DVS. I've said that before. I've said that
22 countless times actually and when I'm sitting in the
23 waiting area within the different offices, I find
24 myself doing constituent services and I find myself
25 talking about DVS and going on my phone and getting

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2 people to contact DVS and they don't have a clue.
3 And I've asked this question before, what type of
4 outreach are we doing in even the VA hospitals and
5 when I say, I am there, several times a year and just
6 a suggestion because again, I do not see any type of
7 tabling or any type of information or pamphlets
8 anywhere. As a suggestion, you can look at the
9 places and offices that people go to more frequently.
10 Not just a waiting area but the x-ray department and
11 the CT scans. Those particular waiting areas on like
12 the sixth floor are heavily populated and they have
13 so much space for tabling. There's just empty space
14 there and I think it's a great opportunity to maybe
15 partner with those facilities to just go in and I'm
16 talking about 23rd Street. I'm not talking about
17 Fort Hamilton, that's a different conversation but
18 there are so many ways that you can do more outreach
19 and again, personally, I don't see those direct
20 touches in certain places that could be helpful and
21 beneficial.

22 And the last, as far as family support. Several
23 years ago, your predecessor testified that Elizabeth
24 Dole Foundation announced New York City as a hidden
25 hero city. Can you tell us what DVS has done since

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2 that time to maintain that status and what your plans
3 are in regards to outreach to caregivers of veterans?

4 JAMES HENDON: For the family support question
5 Council Member I'm going to have to get back to you
6 as far as the hidden hero's city and the Dole
7 Foundation on that. We will circle back to you on
8 that just so you know. And then, as far as DVS
9 having a presence at the VA hospitals, that's also
10 dually noted as far as something we will not just
11 look into but you know, make sure we can make this a
12 reality with how we do our outreach in these places.

13 This goes back to the core issue of outreach was
14 the missing piece of the puzzle as someone who's
15 coming in as a new commissioner. We want to just
16 make sure that we have a better relationship with our
17 veterans.

18 I feel like the first few years of this
19 organization was just building it out. Just actually
20 getting it on its two feet and giving birth to it,
21 but right now, we're in a season where no one cares
22 how old you are, they care that you delivered a day.
23 We're trying to work that, so, yeah, thank you about
24 that.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thanks.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you Council Member
3 Alicka Ampry-Samuel. I just want to mention one of
4 the points that she spoke about is the outreach. So,
5 DVS, you have 40 people working in DVS and the actual
6 outreach is what, how many? How many people you have
7 as paid coordinators?

8 JAMES HENDON: Right now, with this new
9 configuration, where outreach is all housed under
10 current operations, so think, constituent services,
11 think those who work with our folks facing housing
12 insecurity.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How many people do you have
14 actually out on the street, like outside of DVS?
15 Like, not in the DVS facility.

16 JAMES HENDON: I'm just say approximately, I'm
17 just going to have you all try and forgive me, I'll
18 say approximately right now, it's 15 approximately.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 15, so, my question is, is
20 it possible to like, ask the 40 employees that you
21 have in DVS like for at least like for one week to do
22 as a like, a trial just to - people should just go
23 out and bombard the communities, community boards,
24 community council meetings, civic meetings and just
25 to go out and hit all five boroughs and to let people

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2 know whether there are veterans in the room or not
3 because everyone knows a veteran. To say DVS exists
4 and this is what we do and you know, to go to what
5 Alicka mentioned is that every person in this city,
6 8.6 million people, whether you're a veteran or not
7 should know that the DVS exists.

8 So, if we could get our people you know, if you
9 can force the employees to work after five o'clock.
10 I mean, they could come late and just to go out and
11 just like once week, at least once a month, just to
12 go out and -

13 JAMES HENDON: I think what's complicated about
14 that is and I appreciate the suggestion to. Is you
15 know, as an agency, we do have employees where I
16 cannot say to someone you know, a person who was
17 hired to do these things, you need to do this on top
18 of the current responsibilities you have. It's a
19 delicate area for lots of reasons.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, and I understand that.

21 JAMES HENDON: And I appreciate the question.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But if you would ask, would
23 anyone say no?

24 JAMES HENDON: I worried about asking because the
25 idea of compelling a worker to do something that is

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2 beyond the scope of what they've been asked to do
3 while still asking to maintain what their current
4 duties are, it can get touchy when we talk about the
5 different levels of employees that we have in the
6 organization.

7 So, that's one side of it, which is unfortunate.
8 I'll just call that out right now, someone who is new
9 to government. I understand the frustration. The
10 other side of it is we're trying, trying our best to
11 work as smart as we can and leverage resources around
12 us.

13 You know, between a meeting with the folks in the
14 public engagement unit for the Mayor's Office. The
15 folks in the Community Affairs unit also. I'm trying
16 to see what we can do to amplify and have economies
17 of scale with the various organizations to our left
18 and right. I recall us having a conversation, we
19 said hey, you got eight people right here in my
20 office. I guarantee we'll take you up on that at
21 some point as far as reaching out to our various
22 elected officials and their constituent services
23 shops as ways to try to make sure that we can amplify
24 our outreach and people knowing who we are and what
25 we are. I unfortunately have to push back on giving

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2 an order to all of my employees saying, hey in
3 addition to the current work, you also need to do
4 this, because it's just so delicate.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, I just want to ask
6 the Commissioner if the Commissioner could reach out
7 just to your general council to ask, could I ask my
8 employees do you mind doing it and if they say no,
9 then you could just tell me they said no. But if
10 they permit it, then let's do an outreach and let's
11 get all the advocates. I'll go out and I'll speak
12 about it. If we have let's say, especially like a
13 week of reaching out to people in all five boroughs
14 to hit all civic organizations, the community boards
15 everyone. Let's do like one week at least just to
16 get everyone out there with literature, with
17 information on DVS to say, DVS exists. We need to
18 take care of our veterans and we need your help and
19 we just want you to know that there is an agency that
20 helps. Right, and I'm sure I could ask the advocates
21 and I'm sure they will be willing to go out. Anyone
22 not willing to go out? I see no hands are raised.

23 Yeah, so, let's get everyone out.

24 VINCENT GARCIA: Yeah, yeah, I think that's
25 definitely a great idea sir and I think one thing to

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2 that's also important to know, it's not necessarily
3 the, I think the requirement of having staff to go
4 out there. I think what we actually see and what we
5 find is that staff do that on their own initiative
6 anyway. If they understand that there's a meeting
7 within their location. If they understand that there
8 is something that they find very dear to themselves.
9 Because what we find in DVS is we find those that
10 have served, we find those that currently serve, we
11 find those that are already connected to the
12 community and the number of ways that they are
13 connected and you'll see that those individuals do go
14 out there and they do speak on behalf of DVS and
15 interact with individuals on DVS without the mandate
16 to do so.

17 But I do think that you know, if there were
18 opportunities to do better, to get out there, I think
19 we could find it but I also believe that providing
20 that opportunity by a volunteer choice, I think there
21 will be people that would go.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

23 JAMES HENDON: We'll ask our general council
24 also.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, I just want to
3 respond to that. I attend probably I would say
4 almost 100 percent of my meetings in my district.
5 Right, not 50 percent, not 75, I try to hit every
6 single event in my district. Myself, not my staff; I
7 like to be there myself and from all the meetings I
8 go to every month, I think there were one or two
9 times that I saw DVS at the meeting and that was in
10 Community Board 13.

11 So, when you tell me that you have people out
12 there and I don't see it when I attend all the
13 meetings, almost all the meetings if not all and I
14 don't see them, to me, it doesn't mean anything.
15 Because if I go out and I go to all the Community
16 Council meetings, the Community Board meetings and
17 the civic meetings, I don't see DVS there except
18 there was in two occasions, you had a representative
19 there. To me, it's meaningless.

20 Joe Bello works for me, right, my Communitywide
21 Coordinator. I don't tell him to go anywhere because
22 he goes on his own. He's all over the place. He is
23 in all five boroughs. I don't have to tell him. I
24 don't say Joe, you know, where are you going or can
25 you hit this meeting. He does it on his own. I see

1
2 everything, I get feedback and he's amazing, he's
3 just great.

4 Right, so, if we could get everyone instead of
5 going back and forth and telling each other stories
6 and just to say, let's do it. Let's work together
7 and let's get everyone out there and let's let people
8 know what Alicka Ampry-Samuel mentioned. Let's get
9 people out there. If it's having tables and having
10 literature out there, let's do it. I mean, I don't
11 know what the big deal is. Let's get everyone out
12 there and let's get it done. People should know, if
13 I walk into one of my community meetings and I go to
14 the crowd and I say, anyone know what DVS is and no
15 one raises their hand, to me it doesn't mean there
16 was outreach done and I have veterans in my district.

17 So, you know, I would be satisfied and I think we
18 will all be satisfied if we walk into any meeting in
19 the City of New York and ask people, do you know that
20 DVS exists and everyone raises their hand and says
21 yes. That's beautiful and that's what our goal
22 should be regarding doing outreach. It should be
23 part of a conversation. If it's not part of a
24 conversation, then it's worthless.

1
2 You know, we have an uptick of hate crimes here
3 in the city and after speaking to the police
4 commissioner, I have a bill that's being drafted that
5 when the police department reports on crime, it's
6 always under seven index crimes that is reported by
7 the FBI.

8 So, I have a bill being drafted and I spoke to
9 the police commissioner to have hate crimes as part
10 of a conversation at every CompStat meeting, at every
11 precinct Council meeting and he said, excellent idea
12 and they started. Within two weeks, it's all done
13 and now it's a conversation piece. Every precinct
14 commander needs to speak about hate crimes after they
15 are finished speaking about the seven major index
16 crimes.

17 Imagine every meeting we have a discussion about
18 DVS, we have 210,000 veterans and probably even more
19 in the City of New York. Every conversation in this
20 city no matter where you go, there should be a
21 conversation about our veterans, those who gave their
22 life and those who continue to protect us and those
23 who gave us our freedom, gave us everything that we
24 have as New York City residents. As people who live
25 here in the United States of America. We owe it to

1
2 them, so why shouldn't we have a conversation about
3 our veterans everywhere we go.

4 JAMES HENDON: Chair, I'm on board, I completely
5 agree with you as far as you know, ways to look at
6 it. I'm thinking beyond just that one week as far as
7 that blitz as you would call it. I'm thinking about,
8 this goes back to grassroots versus grass tops.

9 So, having an idea of you know, where are the
10 locusts of leadership within New York City across
11 these different spectrums as far as a demographic
12 approach across the city. So, that if we, I keep
13 telling folks in the office, you know, it's not about
14 just hunting the green M&M's which can be very
15 difficult to find. I need to find people who have
16 huge boxes of M&M's all together, then we pluck the
17 green ones out, if that makes sense.

18 In other words, looking at outreach from more of
19 a perspective of reaching out to the broader
20 leadership in the City of New York and making sure
21 that folks know hey, DVS exists and that they help us
22 get the word out and have those veterans come.
23 Because remember, we got a lot of people who don't
24 even identify.

1
2 So, as you know, the issue we're dealing with is
3 about 8.6 or so million New York City residents, of
4 which roughly 210,000 are in our community but they
5 are spread all over this entire expanse and we have
6 many who don't even say, I am a veteran.

7 And so, for us, it's about trying to you know, do
8 things like what you said as far as a blitz
9 effectively. You know, to kind of make sure we get
10 out and get the word out but also, thinking long
11 term. You know your district and all the Council
12 Members know the districts like the back of their
13 hand as far as who the leaders are in your district.
14 Whenever you need something done, you know who to
15 reach out to. Who is in certain positions of
16 influence here and there, we're trying to develop
17 that same thing within this organization. That level
18 of muscle memory, because think about, you've got 169
19 constituents on average and they are confined to one
20 geography, you know who they are. We've got about
21 210,000 constituents and they are not constraint by
22 geography, they are just dispersed.

23 So, the only way do it is to do the same playbook
24 that many people on these days have done as far as
25 understanding who the leaders are as you can help to

1
2 amplify your effect. So, I'm with you, I'm just
3 saying that in the back of my mind, there's this
4 longer term strategy. So, yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, I tried doing long
6 term but then I went to short term. I'd love to do
7 long term. So, if you could give me a commitment
8 Commissioner that we're going to do outreach and
9 we're going to start let's say next week and we're
10 going to get all the advocates. We're going to get
11 everyone after you speak to your general council to
12 see if your staff could go out to hit the streets
13 with literature and everything and share it with
14 other advocates. If you give me a commitment, our
15 hearing is done after I take a few questions from
16 Paul Vallone and I take the panels here.

17 So, if you give me that commitment, we're done.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: No pressure, it's all
19 depending on my questions.

20 JAMES HENDON: Is that right. We're going to do
21 the homework as far as what we're able to do legally
22 on this.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, if you could just get
24 back to me. If they tell you no, then I just want to

1
2 know. Yeah, exactly. If they tell you yes, than
3 we're good.

4 And you know, in my district, when I go to my
5 meetings, I speak about the veterans but I'd also
6 like someone from DVS to actually come out there and
7 say, hey, I work for DVS. Right, so, the people in
8 my district know because I'm the Chair of Veterans
9 and I speak about it but I'd love to have people from
10 DVS go to all 51 districts and let every know that
11 DVS exists. It's very simple.

12 JAMES HENDON: For me, success is giving them a
13 place -

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And when you can identify,
15 when you're trying to identify because you said many
16 veterans don't identify themselves as a veteran,
17 maybe then, once they know DVS exists than we can get
18 more people, we could raise the 75,000 to maybe
19 200,000. I don't know and we could really make an
20 impact and this is just about, it's a very simple
21 thing because it's all about outreach.

22 So, we're not going out there with a shovel to
23 you know, not looking for like a contractor. We're
24 not out there with a hammer drill, it's not heavy
25 work. It's you know, reaching out to people, just

1
2 letting them know. The whole thing is five minutes.
3 At each meeting if someone speaks for five minutes,
4 you know, you hit the meeting every few months, we're
5 done, we're good, excellent.

6 I want to go to Paul Vallone.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you Chair.

8 Another great hearing. I just want to introduce
9 myself. Nice to meet you Commissioner,
10 congratulations. I'm starting my seventh year on
11 Veterans Committee and I couldn't think of anywhere
12 else I'd rather be.

13 So, you've got Council Members who are advocates
14 or natural allies, so I would suggest using with us
15 and taking like Chaim Deutsch just said and Alicka
16 just said, we are the eyes and ears of the district.
17 We know where are veterans are, we know where the DVS
18 is not. So, I would meet with us quickly. I would
19 think that the Veterans Committee is some accrued
20 Council Members you'd want to meet with and take the
21 advice. If Alicka says, just give me a call, we give
22 her a call because nobody knows more than she does in
23 her family's history and I always listen for her
24 testimony and her and her husband to guide me also.

1
2 So, I think these are your key personnel that can
3 help you very quickly. We worked with Commissioner
4 Sutton very well over her term. We have a district
5 and always the largest amount of veterans and the
6 largest Veterans Day Parade at Northeast Queens, so
7 having you come there and be present there, being at
8 the outer boroughs. A year or a budget is being
9 talked about with no growth and possible cuts. You
10 have to be the champion of our veterans to fight for
11 every dollar to make sure you keep it in this agency,
12 try to grow it and probably have to redistribute it.
13 Because if we're not seeing DVS where they need to
14 be, then we need to take a look at where they are and
15 how we get them into the hospitals, into the courts,
16 into the districts and how they have that presence.
17 We will happily work with you. We fought to create
18 DVS when it was just an office.

19 Chaim Deutsch has been advocating for veterans
20 every day and I think hearing that staffs not going
21 to take the extra step. I don't agree with that. I
22 think my staff, just like Council Member Deutsch,
23 they will because if they're working with veterans,
24 they know it's not about the pay. It's about doing
25 the right thing for our veterans and that's not a

1
2 matter of clocking out at five o'clock. That's a
3 matter of being there present every day, taking the
4 extra step at our local civic groups and our
5 community groups and our folks that want to hear from
6 where we can advocate for DVS. Making sure they are
7 on the New York City ID card when they were being
8 left off. All these things were because we
9 championed up here to say, no, no, no, no, that can't
10 be.

11 So, my tip for you and to work with you is, work
12 with us. We don't have to reinvent the wheel; we
13 know what needs to be done and we will get that word
14 out there. We want to meet you and the staff. My
15 one question I guess for this point, because we'll
16 have many hearings in the future is, outer borough
17 complaints for DVS presence has always been a
18 concern. Do you have any goal that you want to bring
19 to change, to work with obviously on Queens, but this
20 is a question from all the boroughs. That you can
21 change the perception and the reality of DVS in the
22 outer boroughs?

23 JAMES HENDON: Well, thank you for your remarks
24 first off Council Member and I didn't say it before
25 but everyone on this, thank you for your advocacy.

1
2 Like, we exist because of you and because of others
3 who sat in these positions on this committee.

4 First off, you know, for the outer borough
5 complaints for DVS, one piece of is to make sure that
6 people such as yourselves, folks who have constituent
7 services groups, that you know when you recommend
8 someone to DVS that they will be treated
9 appropriately. In other words, knowing that we've
10 passed this person who has this need off the DVS and
11 they've gotten taken care of.

12 So, a lot of that goes back to having these
13 relationships and talking with our elected officials.
14 Not just yourselves, also our borough presidents and
15 other elected's to make sure they know hey, you know,
16 we've got this, so that the trust is there. I feel
17 like this also is baked into us improving our
18 outreach on as far as you know, being known as a
19 group that will respond and be right with folks.
20 That's one thing and I say this as someone who lives
21 in the outer borough myself. I completely understand
22 and empathize there.

23 I have to add though, that our center of gravity,
24 I mean our office where our constituent services
25 occur is at one center street. In other words, when

1
2 we have things where it's beyond what we see out in
3 the outer boroughs but somebody needs to come in for
4 additional white glove support, so to speak. That is
5 something that comes back to Manhattan, so that's why
6 these numbers often skew that way.

7 But I pray that as we grow the entire pot as far
8 outreach goes, that we see these numbers increase on
9 the outer boroughs and as we get a better
10 relationship with the main folks who make these
11 referrals who tend to be people such as yourself.
12 You know, so, that relationship, that we'll be in a
13 good spot. I'd be remiss if I didn't say and I want
14 to double down on something that Vince mentioned.
15 We've already got people who are working their day
16 jobs and some. It's just, it's such a nuanced
17 challenge with identifying this particular
18 constituency. We're going to tackle it together and
19 you know, I appreciate the advice and the wisdom that
20 the men and women of the committee have on this
21 because for us, you know, I have folks who are
22 already putting in a certain amount of time but then
23 say, okay, I want to do more, but how do we best
24 direct that effort. Such that it sticks the landing
25 with increasing our traction with our community.

1
2 So, we can then handle things such as the
3 economic empowerment. Handle things such as housing
4 security. Handle things that involve culture, all
5 undergirded by mental health.

6 So, it's still, yeah, I definitely look forward
7 to working with the Council going forward. Not just
8 the members of this committee but beyond, just to get
9 some advice on how to work smart and not hard.
10 Because I fear that we've been working very hard on
11 these things but we need to best canalize the effort,
12 so it has the greatest impact.

13 Something you were saying before, I just wanted
14 to mention. To me, success is maybe it's not
15 necessarily just that we have a DVS person at each of
16 these meetings but that we have cultivated an
17 environment where the word gets out to these
18 different places. Like, we'll do everything we can
19 but to ultimately connect, mobilize and empower the
20 entire veterans community, so that we have this
21 synergistic effect where more know what this is and
22 more people can help you know, uplift who we are as
23 the veterans in New York City.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, Commissioner, oh, you
25 done? Okay, thank you Paul. So, do you believe that

1
2 all 8.6 million New Yorkers should know what DVS does
3 and that DVS exists?

4 JAMES HENDON: Yes. I think it's not just that;
5 it's knowing who we are and that we exist but also
6 working to help us move this entire to the right.
7 That's the issue, it's not just about knowing, it's
8 also, it's a relationship and it's everyone hits, no
9 one quits, we win. The approach to uplifting this
10 community and the caregivers and the survivors and
11 the family.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, do you also believe
13 that we need to do like major outreach into all
14 communities and to make sure people know about it by
15 having people go in and speak about DVS and the
16 veterans services?

17 JAMES HENDON: I do, yes. I say that
18 recognizing, we can't be every single place at every
19 single time.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No, of course not.

21 JAMES HENDON: This is why I need advice from you
22 men and women.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But it makes sense what we
24 mentioned here and like, having you know, DVS - I
25 mean, again, it's not about the DVS staff going out.

1
2 Like Paul put it in few words saying that no one's in
3 there for the paycheck. They're in there because
4 they want to help veterans. I'm sure that they're
5 all going to want to go out and do outreach. If they
6 live in Queens, they'll do it in Queens. If they
7 live in Brooklyn, they could do it in Brooklyn but
8 it's also important that if they can train and they
9 could have other people, other volunteers to go out
10 and speak on their behalf with giving them the proper
11 information, that would be sufficient. That would be
12 fine. It doesn't have to be necessarily DVS's
13 employees going out but if they can train other
14 people and to sign volunteers, say listen, can you do
15 this on behalf of the veterans. Like, they have an
16 auxiliary program right.

17 So, to have volunteers for DVS, right, and say
18 listen, go out and help us do our job and I'm sure
19 people, volunteers out there will say, yeah, I want
20 to help our veterans but we need to take a proactive
21 approach by recruiting volunteers who are out there.
22 Not just these advocates who are here every single
23 day who are living veteran services each and every
24 day but to expand it. You know, so I personally
25 don't care if it's an employee of DVS that comes to

1
2 my meetings. It could be a volunteer who DVS trains
3 and gives that person the information to come into
4 the meetings and discuss it but it should be part of
5 the conversation. Every meeting it should be part of
6 the conversation and that's basically it.

7 So, I'm hoping that we could work together and I
8 just want to say for the record that Commissioner is
9 a very good listener. You know, I have five kids at
10 home. I have four kids left at home and now one's
11 married and it's not always like, you know, they
12 don't always listen to me. Sometimes they make
13 believe that what I'm saying is not important to
14 them, when I ask them to take out the garbage. But
15 anyway, he's a very good listener and I want to thank
16 you Commissioner. I think we will move forward from
17 here making sure that you know, we'll have this great
18 partner, partnership between you and the Council and
19 advocating for more resources for the veteran
20 advocates.

21 So, I want to thank you for being here today and
22 I want to thank you for your partnership and also,
23 you know, the conversations that we have had in the
24 past and your passion and for being a veteran
25

1
2 yourself and you know, sticking up for those who are
3 less fortunate.

4 Thank you much. Alan, any questions?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: No.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No, no questions here, no
7 okay.

8 UNIDENTIFIED: Does it have to be about them.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: What do you want to talk
10 about? Yeah, whatever you want, yeah, It's open.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: I do want to say, I
12 look forward to the partners meeting next week, I
13 mean, next month and it's in East Brooklyn.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, yeah, am I invited?

15 So, thank you Commissioner and we're going to
16 call up, I think we have two panels. If you have
17 time, if you could just stay.

18 JAMES HENDON: I'm staying. Thank you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you so much. James
20 Fitzgerald, Amanda Kraus, William Ovarus, Eric
21 Rosenbaum, Jeremy Butler and Joe Vitti.

22 Your in good hands with Alicka, that's all I have
23 to say.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay, you can get
25 started. You can start from the left and just a

1
2 reminder to just state your name and the
3 organization. Thank you.

4 JAMES FITZGERALD: James Fitzgerald; NYC Veterans
5 Alliance. I am the Deputy Director. Good afternoon
6 and thank you to Chair Deutsch and Committee members
7 for this opportunity to testify today. My name is
8 James Fitzgerald and I am the Deputy Director of NYC
9 Veterans Alliance.

10 A member driven grassroots policy advocacy and
11 community building organization that advocates
12 veterans and families as civic leaders. We work with
13 more than 150 community organizations across the New
14 York City Metro area to promote an event for veterans
15 and families posted online at ourveterans.nyc. Our
16 year around online resource hub visit about more than
17 4,000 users each month. We also remain the only
18 organization dedicated to local level advocacy for
19 veterans and families here in New York City.

20 I greatly appreciate the opportunity to present
21 testimony before you here today. I would like to
22 begin my extending congratulations to Commissioner
23 Hendon on his recent appointment as head of the
24 Department of Veterans Services. We appreciate and
25

1
2 thank him for his continuing service to not only New
3 York City but the United States of America.

4 The New York City Veterans Alliance was a key
5 advocate for the creation of the Department of
6 Veterans Services to support our city's approximate
7 population of 210,000 veterans. About ¼ of our
8 states veterans plus an estimated 250,000 caregivers
9 and family members connected to those veterans.

10 Our membership strongly supports our continuous
11 efforts to set high expectations for the role of DVS
12 in New York City and beyond and there is much to be
13 optimistic about as we look forward to the future at
14 DVS. We applaud the great work that has been
15 accomplished by DVS but there is still much work left
16 to be done. Therefore, we present some items to
17 highlight concerning the future at DVS.

18 We applaud the Mayor's preliminary budget
19 proposal of \$6.68 million for DVS in Fiscal Year 2021
20 but we believe the steady increase in funding will
21 allow DVS to continue growing and improving the
22 quality of this outreach and services. With
23 increased resources, the next fiscal year should show
24 high marks in performance as the agency truly hits
25 it's stride.

1
2 Two, we strongly urge the inclusion of an Agency
3 Chief Contracting Officer, ACCO in DVS's budget and
4 staffing proposal. DVS needs the ability to manage
5 and monitor their significant contract with Northwell
6 for vetconnect.nyc, as currently overseen by DYCD.
7 And the agency that does not have fluency or
8 competency with veterans services.

9 The ACCO's contracting procurement expertise can
10 enhance the agencies ability to provide crucial
11 oversight of discretionary funds from the Council to
12 organizations that provide services to veterans and
13 their families, as well as managing its own request
14 for proposal processes.

15 Oversight of city funds going to veteran services
16 is basically an agency responsibility and would at
17 last bring DVS into alignment with the state and
18 federal counterparts.

19 We urge the Council to ensure DVS has no further
20 delays on establishing and managing contacts and
21 procurement going forward. As this is a necessary
22 function for DVS to truly operate as an independent
23 agency.

24 Three, we strongly urge continued investment in
25 DVS's robust and capable full time human resources

1
2 staffing, so that it provides best in class, in house
3 support for the agencies growing cadre of employees.
4 The vast majority of whom are themselves veterans and
5 family members. Retention and development of DVS's
6 current staff can ensure the agency attracts and
7 keeps the best talents as it builds essential
8 knowledge and experience over the long term best
9 serving our community.

10 City government is the largest employer of veterans,
11 military reserve and their family members in New
12 York City and it needs to be the best employer. DVS
13 should be fully empowered to be a shining example of
14 what White looks like. In supporting veterans,
15 military reserve and family members as employees in
16 City Government and in City as a whole.

17 Four, we strongly urge that DVS establish in
18 house capability to provide consultation on and
19 direct filing of VA claims. In an era where veteran
20 service organizations no longer have capacity and
21 funding to meet the demand of this essential service
22 to the veterans community, it is incumbent on local
23 government to step up with VA credited staff who do
24 have this capability.

1
2 DVS's community outreach staff are currently not
3 capable to offer direct assistance with VA claims and
4 this service is also referred out.

5 With the increase funding projected for the next
6 fiscal year, we strongly urge the council to support
7 DVS in being able to provide this essential service
8 to our community.

9 Five, DVS's core service and accomplishment
10 should be accurately reflected in the Annual Mayor's
11 Management Report and it should also be transparent
12 about areas where more support for improvement is
13 needed.

14 For example, last falls MMR report that DVS
15 provided homeless preventive assistance for 438
16 veterans and permanent housing for 158 veterans.
17 Both of those numbers representing fewer numbers
18 served from the previous year. Not included in the
19 report were more than 600 veterans who remained
20 homeless in the city shelter system or an explanation
21 of there further support was needed to get those
22 veteran services and permanent housing.

23 The MMR also shows the number of community
24 members engaged and given services but the
25 definitions of these metrics should be more clear and

1
2 representative of the true work being done and the
3 impacts on the lives of veterans and families in New
4 York City. We look forward to improved reporting of
5 DVS's impacts in future years and improved
6 transparency about further support DVS needs.

7 I would like to, before I conclude my testimony,
8 I would like to respond to the Councilwoman's earlier
9 comment about veterans and the HUD-VASH. Many
10 veterans currently right now do not qualify for the
11 HUD-VASH; they're currently using CityFHEPS. We're
12 more than happy to connect with your office to
13 provide you more data about what some of the
14 advocates are looking at in concerning that.

15 I thank you for the opportunity to offer
16 testimony today, pending your questions, this does
17 conclude my testimony.

18 JOE VITTI: Good afternoon Chair Deutsch, Members
19 of the City Council, my name is Joe Vitti; I'm the
20 Supervisor for the Visiting Nurse Service of New
21 York's Veterans Hospice Program. I'm also proud to
22 have served in the Military Intelligence Corp in the
23 U.S. Army.

24

25

1
2 I'd also like to extend a welcome to Colonel
3 Hendon. We look forward to working with you in your
4 office as well sir.

5 Visiting Nurse Service of New York, VNSNY is the
6 largest not for profit home and community based
7 healthcare organization in the U.S. providing care to
8 more than 44,000 patients and health plan members
9 every day. VNSNY's hospice program conducted
10 approximately 876 veteran patient admissions. This
11 consists of approximately 26 percent of our World War
12 II veterans, 20 percent Korea War Veterans, 18
13 percent Vietnam and the other 36 percent consists of
14 Peace time or other veteran eras.

15 We have earned a level five status, the highest
16 level you could earn with the National Hospice and
17 Palliative Care organizations We Honor Veterans
18 Program. This is a collaboration between the
19 Department of Veteran Affairs and the National
20 Hospice and Palliative Care organization for Hospice
21 providers who have provided superior care to veteran
22 patients and their family or care givers.

23 In addition, VNSNY certified home health agency
24 offers in home healthcare services such as physical,
25 occupational speech therapy. The patients who need

1
2 rehab services from an injury and or illness that
3 they may have.

4 Lastly, we are proud to be a preferred and
5 contracted partner with the Veterans Affairs
6 Administration under the newly implemented Mission
7 Act.

8 VNSNY has had the honor to work with DVS since
9 its launch in 2016 and they have assisted with things
10 such as recovering a patients discharge papers, their
11 DD214's. This helps me recall a memory that we
12 experienced with a proud Marine Corp Veteran that we
13 had. He was a survivor of the Marine barracks bombed
14 in Lebanon and he was the father of three young
15 children and he had lost all of his records including
16 his DD214 and was going through some severe financial
17 crisis. His only request in his final days were
18 time. In our nature of care, time is of the essence
19 and typically against you. His only request was to
20 receive a military burial from his fellow marines and
21 to have his children know that he served honorably as
22 a marine.

23 This meant everything to the patient. With the
24 quick turnaround time and the assistance of DVS, they
25 were able to recover his DD214 in addition to help

1
2 organize and authorize this patient to receive a
3 burial in Calverton National Cemetery. I cannot
4 begin to explain or describe emotion in that room and
5 what it meant to those childrens and his wife.

6 Our gather data within our electric medical
7 records show that our veteran patients are aging
8 which confirms the alarming stat that all the 22 ½
9 million veterans in America today, 18 million are
10 over the age of 65. Veterans make up approximately
11 25 percent of all the deaths that occur in America
12 today, approximately 1,600 and this really goes into
13 the complexity of why we need to conduct outreach in
14 efforts with the organizations here in this room and
15 DVS and the Committee here. Because of the
16 complexity of the VA system, the system poor health
17 literacy typically we can find within the veteran
18 community and that many veterans never fully access,
19 utilize or exhaust the benefits that they're intitled
20 to. Therefore, VNSNY requests your support for our
21 outreach efforts that would help fellow veterans
22 access the support and resources that they need and
23 deserve for themselves, their loved ones and their
24 caregivers.

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2 If there are no questions this concludes my
3 testimony. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We may need to do a joint
5 hearing with DFTA then. I think the veterans and
6 aging we've been talking about with Council Member
7 Samuel for quite some time and we just can't get DFTA
8 to really prioritize what we're talking about in this
9 room. So, it might be time that we have that exact
10 conversation about the amount of veterans who are
11 seniors and with the specific type of services that
12 need to be provided just for that. I think it's
13 time.

14 JOE VITTI: Yes sir, thank you.

15 JEREMY BUTLER: Good afternoon, my name is Jeremy
16 Butler; I'm a Navy Veteran currently serving Navy
17 Reservist and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of Iraq
18 and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

19 I appreciate having the opportunity to testify
20 today. IAVA members are spread throughout the nation
21 but I'm proud of the fact that our headquarters is
22 located here in New York City. Since we were founded
23 in 2004, IAVA has been successful in fighting for
24 policies to meet the needs of our nations veterans
25 and first responders and we're proud that IAVA was an

1
2 initial proponent for the creation, proper funding
3 and oversight at New York's DVS.

4 We want to see it succeed. We feel that it has
5 enormous potential and its establishment was an
6 historic moment for veterans in New York City. DVS
7 can serve to significantly streamline, access and
8 improve service delivery to many of the most critical
9 veteran specific programs and resources already
10 available here.

11 I'm here today to report on matters that I
12 believe will help improve and strengthen DVS. I
13 appreciate the Chairman raising the issue of military
14 and veterans suicide earlier that has been in IAVA's
15 number one priority. He had mentioned the figure of
16 20 a day. Unfortunately, the numbers are going up,
17 they are going in the wrong direction. In our IAVA's
18 2019 annual member survey, 43 percent of our members
19 reported suicidal ideation since joining the
20 military, which is actually a 12 percent rise between
21 our 2014 survey and the 2019 survey. 59 percent of
22 our members personally know a veteran who died by
23 suicide which was a 19 percent rise since 2014.
24 We're awaiting the results of our 2020 survey but
25

1
2 initial findings show that those numbers continue to
3 go up and not down.

4 The urgency to effectively deliver critical and
5 relevant services to veterans in need has never been
6 greater. He had asked if enough or I'm paraphrasing
7 a little bit on his question, but his question was
8 basically, you know, has ThriveNYC and DVS done
9 enough to deal with the issue of veteran suicide and
10 I can say that the answer is a categorical no and
11 that's not a criticism of DVS. It's not a criticism
12 of New York City. It's a criticism of our country.
13 We have a national suicide crisis that's not being
14 dealt with and the fact is that more resources are
15 needed and more focus needs to be made on making
16 those resources available to veterans and more
17 attention needs to be made to connect veterans to
18 those resources.

19 In order to deal with the increase in Veterans
20 suicide, DVS must have the capability to serve
21 veterans in crisis in a timely manner. A clear
22 deficit we see within DVS is the lack of a
23 comprehensive case management component and an
24 overreliance on third party programs to make
25 referrals and connection to resources.

1
2 DVS was established in 2016, but the Department
3 still does not have an inhouse veteran service
4 officer or case manager. IAVA recommends that DVS
5 create and adequately fund these positions. An
6 inhouse veteran service officer would be able to
7 advise clients on their VA benefits, initiate
8 discharge, upgrade applications and assist veterans
9 in filing the necessary claims or appeals. These
10 positions are critical to the success of DVS and the
11 city's veterans.

12 Removing barriers to getting the veterans the
13 services and benefits they earned will prevent them
14 from falling into the cracks of a giant and
15 intimidating bureaucracy. Without deeper integration
16 into the veteran services infrastructure in New York
17 City and nationally, the potential of DVS will be
18 limited.

19 I would also like to note that DVS does not have
20 an inhouse Agency Chief Contracting Officer. With an
21 annual budget that exceeds \$4 million, that means
22 that these funds are currently monitored by other
23 city agencies that are unrelated to veteran services.
24 This process adds unnecessary steps and could
25 possibly lead to error and delay by staffers who

1
2 maybe unfamiliar with DVS's programs and the needs of
3 the veteran community. IAVA recommends that in order
4 to most effectively manage funds and award contracts
5 that the DVS create and adequately fund a contracting
6 officer position.

7 Again, I appreciate the time to testify and I
8 look forward to answering any questions anyone might
9 have.

10 ERIC ROSENBAUM: My name is Eric Rosenbaum; I'm
11 the President and CEO of Project Renewal on New York
12 City Homeless Services Nonprofit Agency.

13 Good afternoon Chair Deutsch and fellow City
14 Council Members. Thanks for giving me the
15 opportunity to testify here today. For more than 53
16 years, project renewal has empowered individuals and
17 families who are homeless or at risk to renew their
18 lives through critical programs focused on health,
19 homes and jobs. Last year, as each year we serve
20 nearly 15,000 New Yorkers including hundreds of
21 veterans. We're grateful to Speaker Johnson, Chair
22 Deutsch and the City Council for their generous
23 support of project renewals, homeless prevention
24 services for veterans, support that's been crucial
25 for us to help veterans across all of our programs.

1
2 In fiscal year 2019, we provided healthcare to
3 over 140 veterans at our mobile medical vans and
4 shelter based clinics and through our psychiatry and
5 substance use disorder programs. We successfully
6 placed more than a quarter of the veterans living in
7 our homeless shelters into permanent housing and in
8 the past two years, over 87 percent of the veterans
9 we admitted to our housing programs had successfully
10 maintained their housing thanks to our ongoing
11 support services.

12 What I want to focus on today is the life
13 changing impact that our workforce development
14 programs have on the veterans we serve. We believe
15 that the men and women who have served our county
16 deserve sustainable employment at a living wage. Our
17 workforce development programs which help our clients
18 obtain and keep career path jobs, served 42 veterans
19 in 2019. One such program, our award winning
20 culinary arts training program places 80 percent of
21 graduates in jobs higher than the national average
22 for similar programs. We've placed veterans in great
23 jobs at restaurants, institutional and corporate
24 kitchens and at our own social purpose catering
25

1
2 company, City Beet Kitchens, which employs our
3 trainees.

4 Additionally, our next step program provides job
5 training, internship placements and retention support
6 for our clients, including 36 veterans in 2019. A
7 Queens native named Andrew is the perfect example of
8 how our comprehensive services including job training
9 help veterans overcome the complex challenges they
10 face.

11 Andrew served as a Sonar Technician in the Navy.
12 His career was cut short when he became addicted to
13 crack cocaine. He couldn't hold a job and spent
14 years in and out of homeless shelters. Then Andrew
15 came to Project Renewals Recovery Center, the nations
16 first outpatient clinic for homeless adults
17 struggling with addiction. He enrolled the next step
18 and we trained him for a career in social services.
19 Today, Andrew is employed and working towards
20 independent living, thanks to his new job. He's been
21 drug free for over seven months.

22 We want to continue renewing the lives of
23 veterans like Andrew. With further support from the
24 City Council, we have an opportunity to expand our
25 workforce development programs and ensure that more

1
2 veterans achieve the economic stability they need to
3 live independently. We applaud the city for creating
4 the Department of Veteran Services over three years
5 ago. Project Renewal strongly supports the
6 department and values our role as a partner in its
7 mission. We look forward to working more with DVS
8 and welcome suggestions for greater partnership in
9 the future.

10 Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I'm
11 happy to answer any questions after I blow my nose.

12 AMANDA KRAUS: Good afternoon, my name is Amanda
13 Kraus and I'm the Founder and CEO of Row New York.
14 We bring competitive rowing and academic support to
15 mostly young people from New York City. Mostly from
16 low income, under resourced communities. We also
17 started in 2012 an adaptive rowing program for New
18 Yorkers with cognitive and/or physical disabilities.
19 We added to that discrete program really focused on
20 veterans to bring the on water and off water
21 programming to veterans from New York City.

22 Usually we have about 100 or 110 veterans rowing
23 with us each year. People might sort of picture this
24 as you know, a quick jaunt onto the lake or the
25 river. It's actually much more than that and we have

1
2 a lot of gratitude towards Council Member Deutsch and
3 the committee members as well as the Speaker for
4 being so generous in their support in Row New York
5 and our veterans programs.

6 I think what I've learned in seeing our vets on
7 the water and their programming, you're going to here
8 from William Alvarez in a moment is that it's much
9 more than getting into a boat. It's learning to row
10 the boat, balance the boat, move in sync with your
11 fellow veterans and find strength and a team out on
12 the water. We row on Meadow Lake in Queens and
13 Flushing Meadows Corona Park and we also have a site
14 on the Harlem River where our veterans train as well.

15 They don't just train, they compete throughout
16 the Northeast, both indoors and on the water and I
17 think what I've heard firsthand from our veterans who
18 have been involved in our program is that they find a
19 sense of comradery and accomplishment that is very
20 unique and really encourages the sense of self and
21 being out there and working on something greater than
22 themselves together. I personally have had the
23 opportunity to coach or we say cox. William, and an
24 indoor regatta and I'd say that I would encourage
25 each and every one of you if you ever want to come

1
2 and visit us on the water, come out, Council Member
3 Deutsch has come out and visited us but come see this
4 group of men and women in action and in this day and
5 age where there's a lot of sadness and a lot of
6 difficult things going on you will see a lot of hope
7 and a lot of strength with this group of individuals
8 and we're just very grateful to the Council.

9 And I'm going to turn this over to William to
10 speak a little bit about his experience.

11 WILLIAM ALVAREZ: Thank you very much. My name
12 is William Alvarez and this is the first time I've
13 spoken in public. So, you're going to have to excuse
14 me. I'm a native son in New York and I'm a combat
15 veteran.

16 I've been actively Row New York and it has made a
17 big impact on my life. I would say previously I was
18 more isolated and basically stayed by myself but now,
19 I feel like I'm another person. I'm more active, I
20 feel good about myself. It's almost like not having
21 to take any medication. I compete and my first race
22 I competed up in Boston and the VA said, well, if you
23 compete, we'll make you special legs. And I'm
24 wearing them to show them to you.

1
2 What it does if you want to see, if you're
3 interested, you probably won't see it again but these
4 feet flex. I have to unlock them like that and you
5 can see, so when I'm in the boat, I get tied in and I
6 can operate the oars much better and be more
7 competitive. So, actually, on my first race up in
8 Boston, I did come in first.

9 Thank you very much. And so, now, I'm training
10 for a big event in San Diego on April 4th. Row New
11 York is going to sponsor me, so I get there to row
12 and I'm really looking forward to that. I train
13 three days a week, Tuesday and Wednesday night. I
14 mean, Tuesday and Thursday and eight o'clock on
15 Saturday morning. It takes a lot to get up at eight,
16 I mean to be ready at eight and it has been very
17 beneficial. People have talked about suicide. I've
18 seen combat veterans having trouble with PTSD. I've
19 seen suicide and I've seen homicide and I think being
20 active is the best medicine today. I just feel
21 better about myself and a better outlook on life and
22 it's good to have that comradery with all the
23 veterans. It's very supportive and I don't know what
24 else to say. If you have any questions, I'd be glad
25

1
2 to answer them. It's a real pleasure to come here
3 and I appreciate it very much.

4 Also, I'd like to say that I think the veterans
5 appreciate the work you do because they feel like
6 somebody cares.

7 Thank you very much.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you Mr.
9 Alvarez and thank you to the panel. I do have a
10 question. How did you find out about Row?

11 WILLIAM ALVAREZ: The VA made an announcement
12 that there would be an introduction or introductory
13 event, you could talk to people about it and it just
14 seemed like something I would like to do. So, I tried
15 it out and I've stuck with it ever since, over the
16 last three years.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, were you in the
18 VA hospital, like a waiting area and just heard an
19 overhead announcement? How did that go?

20 WILLIAM ALVAREZ: There's a gentleman, Johnathon
21 Glasper[SP?] in Prosthetics and he sent me an email.

22 AMANDA KRAUS: We're always recruiting, so I
23 actually brought some business cards and our team
24 just emailed me or texted me, where we recruit from
25 if you're interested but I know that outreach is a

1
2 huge part of what the staff does and we're always
3 looking for more veterans. So, to all of you as
4 well, no experience necessary. It's a very adaptable
5 sport and we'll do anything to get our veterans to
6 and from the location and fully support it.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: That's my next
8 question.

9 AMANDA KRAUS: Yeah, yeah, a lot of Access A Ride
10 but then to, the races we do that piece. But yeah, I
11 brought some cards, so we're always, always
12 recruiting. Please, you get to have William as your
13 teammate.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thanks again. So,
15 I do have a couple of questions for the panel and
16 anyone can answer. How are DVS's goals aligned with
17 the work that you actually do?

18 JOE VITTI: Thank you for that question. The
19 first thing I would definitely say that stood out to
20 me when I was listening a few minutes ago was
21 outreach. I was mentioning in my testimony that I do
22 a lot of work with our veteran patients and I
23 mentioned the VA but you know the 876 hospice
24 admissions that we did, veteran hospice admissions
25

1
2 that we did, a great majority of those came from the
3 community.

4 So, community outreach, working with our
5 community based organizations, whether they're
6 veteran organizations or some sort of care giver
7 coalition, it's outreach. It's more than half the
8 battle and I think that our admissions of serving our
9 veterans in this case, our veteran patients and
10 caregivers, coincide with one another to really
11 conduct that outreach. I heard there was some data
12 questions coming here pertaining to healthcare for
13 veterans and you know, that's something that we see
14 because the veteran population, they definitely
15 define the definition of population health. There's
16 a lot of patterns and trends that we see in disease
17 states and physical and mental states that we see.
18 So, we try to bring that awareness, education and
19 access to the community, the veteran community.

20 So, does that answer your question?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Yes, anyone else
22 like to jump in?

23 JEREMY BUTLER: Sure, yeah, I'd just say almost
24 100 percent aligns with IAVA is to do and one of the
25 things I was going to mention and add to my testimony

1
2 is that we would love to help support in the outreach
3 of getting DVS awareness to New York City. We're a
4 national organization but you know, we can certainly
5 segment like our mailing lists and stuff like that to
6 let our members in New York know about the services,
7 because that really is what we do. It's the
8 outreach, it's connecting veterans to resources, it's
9 making them aware of changing policies and it's to
10 help drive better policies both at the national level
11 but also at the local level.

12 JAMES FITZGERALD: I would just like to continue
13 to support the message that's going out right now
14 about the outreach portion of things. You know,
15 speaking for NYC Veterans Alliance and you know,
16 myself personally, I've had a wonderful working
17 relationship with DVS. When it comes to you know
18 getting inside of a room and trying to figure out a
19 better way to conduct outreach to you know the
20 210,000 or 210,000 plus veterans that are in New York
21 City.

22 So, continuing those efforts, enhancing our
23 ability once we do connect with those veterans. I
24 see that is 100 percent in line with NYC Veterans
25 Alliance and I look forward to continuing our

1
2 relationship and continuing to build on our
3 capabilities working together.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you and
5 Commissioner, what I also heard was like a recurrent
6 theme was the need for an Agency Chief Contracting
7 Officer and I wanted Veterans Alliance to give like
8 just another example of some of the challenges you
9 face but procurement in the process and what would -
10 can you just give us like a quick example of how that
11 particular position would be more helpful to you
12 based on the work that you're doing and DCAS is not
13 helpful or DYCD.

14 JAMES FITZGERALD: Oh, excuse me, it was DCAS, I
15 need to correct myself on that part of my testimony.
16 It was DCAS that currently has oversight of the Vet
17 Connect Contract. So, I apologize for that earlier.
18 One of the things that we would like to see with the
19 ACCO is a specialized expertise to the veteran
20 community. That's one thing that hammers straight to
21 the core of it. Instead of having agencies and
22 individuals that do not have that in depth knowledge
23 of the veterans community and these specialized needs
24 for our community, I think we're still going to
25 continue to fall short of our overall goals. But

1
2 having someone in the room that understands the
3 veteran community, the needs of that community and
4 how to roll out individual policies within those
5 contracts I feel is someone that DVS severely needs
6 to provide that vital oversight for the amount of
7 contracts that we're currently sending out.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay, and the other
9 question I had was based on your testimony in the
10 last page when you mentioned someone who will be able
11 to provide consultation on a direct filing of VA
12 claims. That's intriguing you know, clearly, because
13 when I'm sitting in different meetings, I hear all
14 the time that someone only has like 30 percent or 40
15 percent or 50 percent and they should be at 100
16 percent and working with other organizations through
17 that process is very difficult and it takes so many
18 years.

19 So, do you think that having someone within your
20 office would be able to assist with that type of
21 process? I'm just trying to get an understanding.

22 JAMES FITZGERALD: Absolutely, because currently
23 right now it's being outsourced but you know, when it
24 just boils down to the basics, me as a veteran in the
25 New York City area when I think of what services are

1
2 provided by DVS, the first thing that I would think
3 of is, you know, helping me process a claim, get
4 connected to my benefits, get connected to the
5 services that I've already earned. Currently, that's
6 not within the wheelhouse of DVS as it currently
7 stands. When it comes to me going in there as a
8 veteran that needs to process a claim, I currently
9 don't have the capabilities of doing that as it
10 stands today.

11 But having someone in there with that expertise
12 about you know, being able to advise and consent with
13 someone's individual case. I think would be a vital
14 need that the agency can bring in to help support the
15 veteran community.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Oh, you hear that
17 Commissioner? You wanted to add.

18 JOE VITTI: Yes, I'd definitely like to piggyback
19 off that. We, I was mentioning that the population
20 health demands that we see. We track our veterans by
21 warrior but also by their diagnosis and there's tons
22 of service connected illnesses, not injuries I'm
23 talking about but illnesses and we track, you know,
24 there's x-amount of cancer or a specific kind of
25 cancer in the Vietnam community, y-amount of

1 Alzheimer's in the Korean War community, x, y, and z.
2 But tons of these patients, I've seen people with
3 multiple purple hearts, prisoners of war and their
4 service and they have a presumptive condition, maybe
5 of being exposed to Agent Orange and they have zero
6 service connection. And like I said, usually in our
7 type of care, time is against them and their families
8 are on the verge of bankruptcy. In my testimony,
9 towards the end of it, you'll see a case about a
10 Staten Island Veterans and there's only you could see
11 that was on I want to say about two years ago, on a
12 news channel. And you know, these families, not that
13 anyone should have to experience, these are the last
14 people who should have to experience it and you know
15 with 800 plus veteran cases we do have a Veterans
16 Benefits Coordinator that works with us but 800 cases
17 to address in a year is difficult for anybody. But
18 to have those outlets to work with DVS, that's part
19 of the outreach to work with those veteran
20 organizations to help with these claims, that would
21 be extremely beneficial to our patients for sure.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: I appreciate
23 hearing that because of course, when we're talking
24 about the veterans and being able to figure out
25

1
2 what's available and resources that are available for
3 them and their families, you know a big piece of it
4 is the economics of it and being able to get what you
5 are rightfully entitled to. And so, to have a
6 specialist in house, would be - so, thank you for
7 adding that piece because this is the first time,
8 I've seen that piece added.

9 So, with that being said, I am going to turn this
10 back over to the Chair.

11 ERIC ROSENBAUM: One thing that I would also like
12 to advocate for, yes, having an entity such as like a
13 Veteran Service Officer inside of DVS would be
14 beneficial to help you know, begin the process or
15 either streamline the process of filing claims but
16 also having legal services provided within the
17 community to support those efforts as well. I
18 understand that that may be a heavy lift for the
19 agency to have that in house but you know, having a
20 robust support from either the Council or another
21 city agency to supplement the needed legal services
22 to help those veterans that may need some type of
23 legal services to get an upgrade for their discharge
24 in order to receive state benefits or receive city
25

1
2 benefits. So, the legal services component is a
3 vital piece of that as well.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay, so that would
5 be good to have in writing as an actual ask of
6 individual Council Members within like this timeframe
7 with discretionary funding because I know we will
8 allocate funding to legal services for so many other
9 things and this has never been a ask of me before,
10 so.

11 ERIC ROSENBAUM: Absolutely, I'll definitely
12 touch base with your office and also your Chair.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, thank you. Thank
15 you so much and I want to thank you for taking the
16 time today to be here. Next panel, and I also want
17 to thank Mr. Alvarez for bringing up Row New York and
18 I had an opportunity to visit Row New York several
19 times, so thank you very much.

20 Next panel, Kent Eiler, Sam Sloane, Peter
21 Kempner, Joe Hunt, Coco and Charlotte.

22 Okay, we'll go clockwise.

23 KENT EILER: Thank you Chair Deutsch. Good
24 afternoon Chairman Deutsch and good afternoon to you
25 and the honorable members of this Committee. My name

1
2 is Kent Eiler; I'm the Project Director of the City
3 Bar Justice Center as Veterans Assistance Project.

4 Since the beginning of the city's Department of
5 Veterans Services in fiscal year 2017, veterans and
6 their service providers have watched the city agency
7 with tremendous hope. People have understood that
8 the footprint of DVS with its annual budget of a
9 little over \$5 million couldn't begin to compare with
10 the \$1.7 billion annual footprint in the city from
11 the Federal Department of Veteran Affairs, VA. But
12 it was never expected DVS would compare or compete
13 with the feds. Instead the hope and the reason so
14 many veterans advocates supported the creation of
15 DVS, was the belief that this relatively small,
16 nimble agency would be able to consult closely with
17 the city's veterans and service providers to identify
18 how the city could best identify gaps in services and
19 meet the needs of the city's veterans in light of
20 those gaps.

21 At the federal level, leadership at the VA has
22 long been criticized for being aloof. The wrap on
23 the VA is that far too often it prescribes policies
24 that fail because those policies are informed by
25 political appointees as opposed to primarily being

1
2 concerned with efficacy, inputs from subject matter
3 experts and the needs of the veterans whom the VA is
4 tasked to serve.

5 The VA for decades has been burdened by the well
6 intentioned ideas from long ago departed political
7 appointees. All too often when seeking a dialogue,
8 veterans and their advocates are subject to a one way
9 conversation, where it's the VA that does all of the
10 talking. It's vital when DVS was created and remains
11 vital today that DVS avoid recreating at the local
12 level the problems that veterans can experience at
13 the federal level with the VA.

14 It's vital that DVS be engaged with the city's
15 veterans community. Its size and budget mean that to
16 be affective, it must prior to prescribing policy,
17 consult with service providers and subject matter
18 experts to learn what services are being provided to
19 veterans to avoid unnecessary duplication of existing
20 services. Recently, DVS announced an upcoming event
21 on February the 6th where it will discuss with
22 community partners, it's "2020 strategic plan and
23 vision for supporting veterans and their families in
24 the future. This is a welcomed development.

1
2 At the February 6th event and events like it in
3 the future, it will be important for DVS leadership
4 to listen to community partners about what DVS
5 priorities should be. With the realities of finite
6 resources, it is vital that DVS demonstrate as a good
7 steward of the city's taxpayers monies. DVS must
8 relentlessly examine what it is doing and discard
9 that which is not working, while embracing what is
10 working while continuing to seek further
11 efficiencies.

12 At present, the VA's \$1.7 billion annual
13 footprint in the city shrinks every year as does the
14 number of veterans in the city. According to the
15 VA's National Center for Veterans Analysis and
16 Statistics, the VA's fiscal footprint in New York
17 City shrunk by more than \$25 million in VA
18 compensation and VA pension benefits from FY '17 than
19 it was to FY '18.

20 DVS should consider adopting as part of it's
21 mission plans on how to address the federal fiscal
22 tide of VA dollars leaving New York to the extent
23 that it can. One way this committee helps to steam
24 that fiscal tide is through it's veterans legal
25 initiative. The City Bar Justice Center's Veteran's

1
2 Assistance project is pleased to be included as part
3 of that initiative. The mission of the Veterans
4 Assistance Project that the City Bar is making sure
5 veterans have competent legal counsel. To ensure the
6 VA is paying veterans the compensation benefits they
7 have earned through their military service.

8 Despite the VA's \$1.7 billion annual footprint
9 across the five boroughs today, not a penny of that
10 \$1.7 billion from the feds is outlaid towards
11 veterans focused legal services due to present legal
12 limitations the VA has placed on the funding of Legal
13 Services.

14 Well, more certainly can and should be done at
15 both the city and the state level, the Veterans Legal
16 Initiative is just one example of the city
17 identifying a gap in services and then taking steps
18 to try to mitigate that gap. By embracing an
19 approach of engagement with the city's veterans
20 community of demanding efficiencies and a commitment
21 to rooting out service gaps, DVS will have before it
22 a new exciting prosperous future.

23 Thank you.
24
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you Kent. So, Kent,
3 obviously you're in touch with DVS right throughout
4 the year?

5 KENT EILER: We participate Chairman in the - we
6 are a referral source from Vet Connect. So, we do
7 get referrals from Vet Connect from time to time who
8 have cases that Vet Connect has suggested they reach
9 out and contact us.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, are you satisfied with
11 the way they connect to you with services and if you
12 have any questions, do you have like an open dialogue
13 with DVS?

14 KENT EILER: I am always happy to engage with DVS
15 anytime that they would like to engage with me and I
16 will make that outreach effort again.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, how often does DVS
18 contact like organizations and agencies such as
19 yourself to just find out you know, because you're a
20 referral, like, how often do they contact you and say
21 okay, is everything okay? Is there anything that we
22 need to offer? Anything that DVS has you know, in
23 order for you to be more efficient and to make sure
24 that everything is running smooth, do you receive
25 calls from DVS just to follow up?

1
2 KENT EILER: It has not been on a regular basis
3 Chairman.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so I think we should
5 make sure, yeah. Okay, thank you Kent.

6 PETER KEMPNER: Good afternoon, my name is Peter
7 Kempner and I'm the Legal Director at Volunteers of
8 Legal Service. One of the programs that I oversee is
9 our Veterans Initiative, which conducts free weekly
10 legal clinics at the Manhattan campus of the VA
11 Healthcare system, where we provide free civil legal
12 services to low income veterans age 60 and over.

13 A core part of our work is providing wills and
14 other advanced directives to low income senior
15 veterans. These critical documents ensure that the
16 wishes of senior veterans are carrying out by the
17 people they love and trust the most and they also
18 ensure that veterans are able to live in the
19 community for as long as possible. And they prevent
20 displacement and help avoid costly and unpleasant
21 legal proceedings like guardianships if veterans
22 become incapacitated.

23 I also teach the Veterans Legal Clinic at New
24 York Law School and have been involved with providing

1
2 veterans legal services for the greater part of a
3 decade.

4 We thank the Council for having this oversight
5 hearing today. As DVS enters its fourth year, I
6 think it's a great time for both DVS and the City
7 Council to reflect on what we've done as a community
8 to improve the lives of New York City's veterans but
9 also to look forward to see how we could do better as
10 a community to serve those who have served us.

11 I would like to highlight two issues today. One
12 of which has actually been talked about already, but
13 to add my perspective and that is, access to benefits
14 from the Departments of Veterans for New York City's
15 veterans and the second is, the city's efforts to
16 continue to address the veteran homelessness issue.

17 This past summer actually, the Association of the
18 Bar of the City of New York published a report
19 concerning the inadequate financial support for legal
20 services for veterans in connection to VA benefits.
21 The report highlighted several disturbing facts. New
22 York State actually has the fifth largest veteran
23 population in the country but lags far behind other
24 states in the number of benefits that are received by
25 our veterans from the VA.

1
2 Less than 17 percent of the New York's Veterans
3 statewide receive either service connected disability
4 benefits or VA pension. While the national average
5 is 23 to 24 percent of veterans receiving those
6 benefits.

7 In addition, as per VA's own statistics, New York
8 veterans have lower income and lower educational
9 attainment than other veterans showing that they
10 probably need the VA benefits more, not less than
11 other veterans across the country. It isn't because
12 our veterans are healthier than veterans elsewhere in
13 the country that they're receiving less benefits,
14 it's because access to those benefits are not being
15 supported and encouraged in the same way they are
16 perhaps elsewhere.

17 And a lack of legal services funding to represent
18 people who are before the VA, whose initial claims
19 have been denied, would make great strides in
20 conquering that.

21 Hearing from the gentleman from VNS about
22 veterans who are at the end of life who have
23 presumptive service connected disability, related to
24 Agent Orange exposure, is just appalling. These
25 people should know about their access to those

1
2 benefits much earlier. It shouldn't be spotted when
3 they are at their end of life and we should be
4 engaging them throughout and I think this does speak
5 to the issue of outreach, but it also speaks to the
6 issue of making sure that the veterans have adequate
7 legal services available to them with respect to VA
8 benefits and that just is not happening in New York
9 City right now.

10 There is a model though that New York State has
11 with respect to this and that's in the area of Social
12 Security benefits. New York State has a program
13 called DAP, a Disability Advocacy Project where we
14 provide legal services to – we provide funding to
15 legal services providers to represent people before
16 the Social Security Administration who are disabled.

17 There's a recognition there that if you get
18 somebody onto Social Security benefits, they come off
19 of state and local benefits. So, they are no longer
20 on public assistance benefits. They're getting
21 federally funded benefits at that point.

22 That also means in inflex of millions of dollars,
23 which is something that Kent mentioned in his
24 testimony. We get millions of dollars more flowing
25 into the New York State and New York City economy if

1
2 we have more federally funded benefits for our
3 veterans.

4 In addition, it's just the right thing to do. If
5 somebody has a service connect disability or they've
6 served during war time and are entitled to a VA
7 pension, we should ensure that veterans have access
8 to those benefits. And I think having free legal
9 services for those veterans would be a real stride in
10 that direction and we have models for that right now
11 as well.

12 The second issue I want to briefly talk about is,
13 with respect to veteran homelessness, right now we
14 have I think as the Councilwoman had mentioned
15 before, we have funded a huge amount of legal
16 services, particularly in the area of eviction
17 prevention. And so, the Universal Access to Council
18 program has been historic in New York City. We've
19 made huge strides in cutting back the number of
20 evictions that happen.

21 And we all know this is a recognition that the
22 best way to stop homelessness is prevent it from
23 happening in the first place. People will not end up
24 in shelter if they don't get evicted and HRA has done
25 amazing things with Universal Access to Council, yet

1
2 there have been countless veterans who have been cut
3 out of this program for two reasons. First, is that
4 they are rolling it out zip code by zip code and we
5 have encountered many veterans who go to these legal
6 services providers who don't live in the designated
7 zip codes and say, you're not eligible.

8 The second thing is based on income. Right now,
9 somebody has to be at or below 200 percent of the
10 federal poverty level in order to qualify for
11 Universal Access to Council. Somebody who is 100
12 percent service connected disabled will receive about
13 \$3,000 a month from the VA. That puts them at 300
14 percent of the federal poverty level and they are
15 excluded from receiving free legal services in an
16 eviction case under the Universal Access to Council
17 program because they are over income.

18 These are people who have sacrificed the most in
19 service to their country and they are being told when
20 they face eviction that they're too rich because they
21 get \$3,000 a month from the VA in order to get free
22 counsel and that's just wrong. We need to make sure
23 that all veterans who are facing eviction are being
24 given free attorneys to help them prevent being
25 coming homeless.

1
2 The other thing is with the Administration of
3 this program, is that HRA is not screening for
4 veteran status when people come to their office in
5 order to try to get this help from Legal Services
6 providers. HRA is not asking tenants, have you
7 served? Have you worn the uniform. Instead they
8 say, you're outside the zip code, you're over income,
9 you're not eligible. And what we need to be doing as
10 far as interagency cooperation is concerned, is to
11 make sure that HRA is aware of these issues. HRA is
12 screening for veteran status. All agencies need to
13 be screening for veteran status when administering
14 benefits and services to all New Yorkers, because
15 that way we could build a list of people who we know
16 are veterans and could perform the proper outreach to
17 them.

18 So, those are two areas I think that going
19 forward we need to focus on as a community to make
20 sure that veterans have access to the benefits to
21 which they deserve and also access to programs we
22 have in New York City to make sure that they don't
23 become homeless.

24 Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, I have two
3 questions for you Peter. First of all, how many
4 veterans are being like, according to calls that you
5 receive, how many veterans are being evicted. Like,
6 if you could give me like approximate number. Like,
7 do you think it's like a lot, it's a high amount?
8 And also, for what reasons are they being evicted
9 for?

10 PETER KEMPNER: I think that number is unknown
11 because frankly, we're not tracking it right. HRA
12 doesn't know how many people they are turning away.
13 Who are veterans, because they are not asking them
14 and so, perhaps the people who would know are DHS to
15 see how many new veterans are going into the shelters
16 and how many are going into the shelters because they
17 were evicted. But that's not numbers that I know or
18 that the people who are administering right to
19 Council know either.

20 And, I'm sorry, what was the second question?

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: For what reasons are they
22 being evicted?

23 PETER KEMPNER: I think it's a wide range. I
24 mean I think it ranges from nonpayment of rent cases,
25 to hold over cases and a lot of these things are

1
2 avoidable frankly. Especially the nonpayment of rent
3 cases. We could access SSVF services, we could
4 access one shot deals from HRA. Veterans should be
5 getting access to CITYFEPS to give them the financial
6 supports they need to pay ongoing rent. And so,
7 identifying veterans is extremely important because
8 then we know what resources in the community to hook
9 them up with.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, how would they know to
11 come to you? How would they know to go to you?

12 PETER KEMPNER: Well, we actually don't even
13 provide representation of veterans of housing court,
14 because we're not funded for that and there are
15 certain legal services providers that do, but many of
16 the legal service providers who are the big providers
17 under Universal Access to Council don't have special
18 veteran carve outs, don't get funding for this and
19 the same with them, when they see veterans who are
20 outside the zip codes or over income, they are
21 turning them away as well.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, how do we know when a
23 veteran is being evicted, how would that veteran know
24 that they need to contact someone or do they contact
25 someone?

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2 PETER KEMPNER: They don't know and that's the
3 problem. If the courts screen for veteran status, if
4 HRA screen for veteran status, these people could be
5 found much earlier in the process and try to get them
6 to a legal services provider who could help or better
7 yet, provide a blanket exception for all veterans who
8 are facing eviction to make sure that they have
9 access to universal right to counsel and that way
10 they won't have to be knocking on the doors or going
11 to Vet Connect or wherever it is. They will get
12 right to counsel through the courthouse at the very
13 beginning of an eviction proceeding.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, so, I'd like to do
15 two things. Firstly, I want to ask the Commissioner
16 if when we do the outreach, if we could mention this.
17 This should be part of the thing, that if you are
18 veteran and you're being evicted, they should notify
19 DVS. That's why it's important for people to know
20 who to contact.

21 And number two, if you could speak to Joe Bello
22 and I'd love to set up a meeting with HRA and bring
23 this up to them and let's see if we can get it done.
24 If we have to put in the vote in the City Council,
25 let's do that. Whatever it takes for them to track

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2 for HRA to get involved and to have early detection,
3 let's get it done. So, I would love to, if you could
4 have a conversation with Joe and let's set up a
5 meeting.

6 PETER KEMPNER: Absolutely.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, so, very important.
8 Thank you so much.

9 PETER KEMPNER: Thank you.

10 SAM SLOANE: Good afternoon everyone. So, my
11 name is Sam Sloane; I am a Public Defender with the
12 New York County Defender Services. We are one of the
13 primary public defender offices in Manhattan. We
14 represent roughly a quarter of the criminal cases
15 that come through the system in a given year.

16 Throughout my time as a public defender, I've
17 handled cases from arraignment through trial but I've
18 also had extensive experience with the various
19 alternatives to incarceration offered in both
20 Manhattan criminal but mostly Supreme Court, which is
21 to say felonies.

22 And this has led me to my recent role as the
23 Veterans Court Specialist with New York County
24 Defender Services. You know, so, as a Veteran's
25 Court Specialist, I think as an organization rather,

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2 we're trying to do a number of things and this is
3 sort of a theme that I've heard throughout testimony
4 today.

5 Number one, we're trying to identify clients that
6 we have who have a prior history of military service.
7 One of the first questions we ask people in
8 arraignments is if they have any experience. If
9 they're veterans or any experience with military
10 service and I think somewhat anecdotally but from my
11 personal experience, it's been astounding that people
12 will not bring it up voluntarily. They will tend for
13 a variety of reasons, sort of it might take three
14 times meeting them before you find out that they have
15 served back in the 70's for four years.

16 So, we are trying to do our best to identify.
17 Once we've identified somebody, the next step is
18 generally to sort of connect them with services.
19 Again, this is something that we've sort of heard and
20 I think we share similar goals with VDS and everyone
21 else at this table, because it's also been remarkable
22 how our clients either don't know they're eligible or
23 maybe have fallen off or fallen behind on certain
24 eligibility requirements for various services.
25 Whether that's through the VA or through a city

1
2 agency and again, so helping them connect with our
3 social work staff.

4 The next thing we do is for those people that are
5 eligible, we try to screen them for Manhattan
6 Veteran's Treatment Court, which is primarily, I
7 guess at this point, only exists for pending
8 felonies. Generally nonviolent felonies but with the
9 prosecutions consent, if you sort of qualify any
10 violent felonies can be eligible. These are also
11 individuals who are generally facing mandatory prison
12 sentences, quite lengthy sometimes and I think one of
13 the main benefits with Manhattan Veterans Treatment
14 Court as opposed to some of the other treatment
15 courts, is that everyone in the treatment court is a
16 veteran. The court staff, some of them are veterans.
17 There are peer mentors who are volunteers, who are
18 veterans in the room. There is the local VJO,
19 Veterans Justice Outreach, which I believe is through
20 the VA. They are all there.

21 Btu I think it also brings our clients into sort
22 of the tribe or bring them back, it surrounds them
23 with people who have shared their similar experiences
24 but it also gives them a sense of pride. Our clients
25 you know, we're not usually meeting them in their

1
2 best moments and I think again, this is going to be
3 somewhat anecdotally but we have noticed higher
4 success rates with this treatment court, probably for
5 reasons I've mentioned.

6 Because I'm somewhat new in this role, I have not
7 had an opportunity to work directly with DVS, but I
8 think some of the issues that we have in getting our
9 clients access to services, I think are shared and I
10 truly welcome the opportunities to work with you
11 going forward.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very much. I
14 have a question. You have approximately probably
15 like 5,500 people in prison right now in Rikers
16 Island. Is there anyway to know how many veterans
17 are actually sitting in Rikers today?

18 SAM SLOANE: Yeah, so, one of the things we do is
19 if we have a veteran that is incarcerated, we will
20 flag the VJO, which is the Veteran's Justice Outreach
21 worker who I just know through my work with Manhattan
22 Veteran's Treatment Court, I know they are working to
23 set up a wing of Rikers for Veterans. It does not
24 currently exist for people who are sentenced but only
25 for those that have cases pending.

1
2 But again, it's usually relying on somebody
3 catching it along the line and notifying the VJO, who
4 will then go and try to get them moved into the
5 veterans wing.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, with the closing of
7 Rikers, they're going to be opening up four borough
8 based jails. Because, the truth, I haven't heard
9 anything about anything in the local jails that the
10 city's planning to open up a veterans site. I know
11 there's supposed to bring in different resources but
12 there's a few things.

13 Number one, is that services for veterans, there
14 are resources right. So, the city pays tens of
15 thousands of dollars for a person who is in jail.
16 Right, so first of all, services come from the
17 federal government, a lot of it for servicing the
18 veterans and then, their needs are a little different
19 than maybe different than others who are sitting in
20 jail who are incarcerated.

21 So, the question is, how do we identify and also,
22 working with the local government to find out in the
23 borough based jails, with all the services they're
24 planning on having, what is there for veterans?
25

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2 SAM SLOANE: And I don't want to speak if this is
3 already happening but I think that one thing that we
4 try to do is coordinate with discharge planning and
5 most people who are you know, if it's a city sentence
6 or you're on your way out, they are going to get
7 assigned a discharge planner somewhere along the way
8 through corrections and if we can coordinate
9 discharge planning with veteran services when they're
10 stepping out, they can immediately get help with
11 their HRA benefits. Because most of our clients, I
12 shouldn't say most, but a lot of our clients are
13 homeless or functionally homeless.

14 And so, to get the ball rolling before they
15 leave, I think is a big help but as far as
16 identifying mechanisms, I don't know. I think CJA is
17 trying to do that but again, sometimes it takes three
18 or four times to sort of ask a question before you
19 get a straightforward answer because if CJA asks them
20 during criminal court arraignment, a lot of times
21 people just are not in a great place at that moment,
22 so they might have been a sleep or who knows and
23 then, usually the first time we meet them again, not
24 a great moment but throughout you know, at some point
25 they will open up and then it's our job to sort of

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2 notify all you know, discharge planners, social
3 workers, anyone involved, that we have a pending you
4 know, a veteran client.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great, if you don't mind,
6 if you could leave your number with Joe and I'd love
7 to have another conversation. And when there's
8 conversations in the city about the new borough based
9 jails, I'd love to have your input and working with
10 the city to make sure that we have the right proper
11 veteran services within the jails.

12 SAM SLOANE: I would love that to.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, thank you very much.

14 SAM SLOANE: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Now, Coco. Infamous Coco.

16 COCO CULHANE: Infamous? I'll take it, I'll take
17 it. Good afternoon. My name is Coco Culhane; I'm
18 the Executive Director of the Veteran Advocacy
19 Project. We provide free legal services to low
20 income veterans and their families and we focus on
21 working with those with mental health conditions.

22 I just want to say that CJ is identifying
23 veterans. There is a veterans unit. There are a
24 number of different sort of advocacy networks that
25 are working depending on the borough. We're involved

1
2 in a couple of boroughs. So, would love to talk
3 further about that if anyone wants to.

4 Anyway, so I want to start by saying that I have
5 worked over the last ten years with incredible
6 advocates at MOVA and DVS. We depend on them, the
7 services, their dedication to their constituent
8 services, they really go above and beyond. And one
9 of the things in the lead up to this hearing, we
10 actually did some testing because we were wondering
11 well, you know VAP are calling. Perhaps that's why
12 we're getting such good results and we had some of
13 our clients call and ask for information in several
14 areas and it was incredible. The quality that they
15 got back. How thorough the information was. It was
16 really something to be emulated.

17 So, I'm going to start with that and I want to
18 say the problem is no one would ever know that.
19 There's no data you know, outside of sort of the
20 homelessness and housing efforts, there's just
21 painfully little data that's been released.

22 The law that passed last year that required DVS
23 to publish on their website, any number of specific
24 values I couldn't find today. It was supposed to be
25 there by December 15, 2019 and if we look at the

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2 Mayor's Management report, which was I think just
3 about two pages, you know, there's a mention that the
4 number of constituents served went down a little bit
5 and then the rest of the report was really like, we
6 added the word families to our goals. I mean, that's
7 about all the information that we got.

8 So, what does get published and what has been
9 highlighted I think in the past, are a series of
10 really big ideas with these verbose press releases
11 and then there's no follow through and if you look
12 through all these things that DVS has announced, it's
13 monumental. It's incredible, all the things that
14 they're doing. I mean the number of ideas but I
15 can't find evidence that these things are happening.

16 So, you know, what we need is solid programs and
17 transparency. You know, one of the examples is that
18 last year we did hear about DVS doing justice
19 involved outreach and we were thrilled and I reached
20 out to someone and said, hey, we just launched this
21 initiative ourselves, let's team up. And I was told
22 it was just a press release. That DVS has gone to
23 the opening of the veterans unit and had never been
24 out there again. There was no involvement.

1
2 So, that loses trust, right. That loses trust
3 among the advocate community and it does the veteran
4 community no good. Another example, and maybe I'll
5 just skip over this, Core Four. I mean, I've said it
6 so many times, it's a model and apparently, it's been
7 touted now globally but what good is a model if it's
8 not actually being used. You know, the main base is
9 supposed to be arts and culture. As far as I can
10 tell theater of war has been you know, since 2017,
11 has been the only thing that you can find on the
12 website.

13 So, what's being done, right? And if you go
14 through each level, every organization has no clue
15 what their responsibility really is. So, once again,
16 what is Core Four? What is it doing?

17 And, I want to also say, you know, if you look at
18 what DVS listed as their priorities for the coming
19 year. You know, last year they said vets on campus,
20 Mentor a Vet, veteran career counsel.

21 So, another current city employee told me as I
22 was checking on this, that the Mentor a Vet
23 initiative, was they got all these different
24 organizations into a room once and nothing ever
25 happened again. That's not a program, right. DVS

1 cannot be all things to all people. They can't go
2 out to Rikers, provide benefits, provide outreach,
3 provide all this excellent information, take on legal
4 services, right, like, they cannot do that. So, what
5 needs to be done, is there needs to a realistic focus
6 and follow through and accountability.
7

8 Right now, there is just no accountability and if
9 you look, you know, recently they said that they've
10 changed the website. They have this great new
11 element on the website. So, you click on get help,
12 it takes you to Vet Connect and a resources map.

13 I entered housing into this resources map and it
14 took me to some location in **[INAUDIBLE 2:19:46]**. I
15 think that's an embarrassment. I think that the idea
16 that that is sitting on our website, and I say our
17 because as a community we are responsible. That's an
18 embarrassment.

19 Another law was they were supposed to create a
20 resources guide. So, if you go on the website, it
21 says July 2019. Click open, it's an April 2019
22 infographic that lists the topics that a veteran
23 might come to DVS for. It doesn't you know, actually
24 list resources. A few, sorry, I should correct, it
25 does a few. Kent Eiler's organization is listed.

1
2 Saying that it will solve any legal problem and in
3 fact, that's not true and also, Kent is so
4 overwhelmed and has a backlog in the areas he does
5 provide. Right, so, I just, I think that these
6 things need to be highlighted. There needs to be
7 change.

8 The startup report, it's just, it's mind blowing.
9 Like the list of accomplishments that aren't even
10 DVS's right, and I say this because there is
11 incredible work being done and that needs to be
12 highlighted, it needs to be the focus, it needs to be
13 counted. The data that was supposed to come from
14 that and maybe that report has been published I don't
15 know; I just couldn't find it. That data is key and
16 all of us, all of the advocates in the room can use
17 that data to better focus our services.

18 So, this isn't, I don't think that this is just
19 me infamously attacking, right. I mean, we need to
20 do better and I think we're at this amazing moment
21 where we can. Where there's change and you know, we
22 definitely look forward to working with the new
23 Commissioner and to the incredible people who do make
24 up this agency but I think all of us need to demand
25 absolutely accountability and transparency.

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Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you Coco. So, I just want to ask the Commissioner that two things. Number one, do you have a liaison to the VA? Do you have a liaison to the VA from DVS, within DVS?

JAMES HENDON: No, we don't. Not to my knowledge.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so I think what's important is, what I've been hearing so far from the panel that if you could assign someone to be the liaison to the VA, to organizations such as Kent and some others here, so this way if they have issues with the VA, this is what we have - someone who is the go in between to advocate for some of the things that they may need in order to help their clients.

And number two, I think it's important to also have someone assigned within DVS to be in touch with all the advocate groups, like Coco and others here and everyone I think, just to receive the feedback. Because it's easy to refer you know, veterans to them but then without getting the feedback and I see how frustrated Coco is today.

COCO CULHANE: Never.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, well, how passionate
3 she was today.

4 COCO CULHANE: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes. Yeah, sure.

6 JAMES HENDON: Sir, just to clarify, sorry, as
7 far as a liaison to the VA, we have our constituent
8 services you know, component within our office that
9 is there, that's the closest thing we have as far as
10 that body. And then, one of the other demographics
11 that I mentioned before was actually the VSO's, the
12 Veteran Services Organizations which is really what
13 you call an advocate.

14 So, leaders such as the folks who have been
15 testifying to just touch base with that leadership,
16 so we've got that constant synergy with you all.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do they have a contact? Do
18 you have a contact for anyone in DVS? Peter, do you
19 have a contact?

20 PETER KEMPNER: Not to directly criticize. Our
21 veterans initiative, you know, I've been doing this
22 work for almost a decade and another organization
23 recently came to evolve and started our veterans
24 initiative and we've been actually desperately trying
25 to get on Vets Connect NYC and I don't know a dozen

1
2 emails and had a phone call and we can't get
3 ourselves listed to be able to let folks know that
4 we're providing this service in the community.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Did you get a reason why
6 you're not listed?

7 PETER KEMPNER: I mean, we're new and so, you
8 know there was a process there and I appreciate that
9 process but you know, we had a call three months ago
10 and sent follow up emails and I'm going to call Joe
11 but I don't know if like, how many other
12 organizations are experiencing that kind of thing and
13 becoming frustrated.

14 You know, I'm trying not to be frustrated because
15 I get how hard it is and how much they have on their
16 plate, but these are the realities we face.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, alright, yeah sure.

18 JAMES HENDON: Something I didn't clarify,
19 forgive me. When I speak -

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Commissioner, you can pull
21 a chair up.

22 JAMES HENDON: I can sit with the cool kids.
23 Yeah, yay.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We're all family here.
25

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2 JAMES HENDON: When I speak about us being
3 configured in the current operations, future
4 operations admin, these things are going to take
5 effect after the Hope Count formally. And Hope Count
6 is our count of our homeless population in the City
7 of New York. I'll be in Sheepshead Bay by the way.
8 That count is going occur on the 27th. The 28th is
9 when we're going to have some final moves in place.

10 So, we're doing a transition where it's going to
11 be fully locked in but we'll have people who dedicate
12 it to do things like this in their roles on the 28th.
13 Just so you know what's coming.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so someone is going
15 to be in touch. So, I just want to mention other
16 things to, regarding to advocates, is there anyone
17 who could be in touch with the advocate groups, just
18 to make sure that they're okay. If they have any
19 questions, that they could answer their questions?

20 JAMES HENDON: Absolutely yes, and there's
21 someone for whom that's their outreach. That's their
22 portfolio is just leaders of the veteran service
23 organizations.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Who is that? Do you know
25 who that is?

1
2 JAMES HENDON: Well, I wanted to wait until we
3 lock in the organizational change on the 28th to
4 announce that. We have someone identified but you
5 know, really as of January 28th, we're going name
6 that person. We already have someone.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so Coco, that's
8 helpful right.

9 COCO CULHANE: So, I speak regularly with Aden
10 and other people. We have good communication with
11 constituent services. I don't think - I mean I can't
12 speak to that. I'm just saying there have been a lot
13 of announcements that we try to be a part of and then
14 it turns out there's nothing.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, I always tell my
16 constituents that, don't wait for me to come to a
17 monthly meeting that you know, people are going to
18 complain to me about issues that affect them, but
19 reach out right away.

20 So, I think we need to constantly listen to what
21 you have to say and others have to say. Contacting
22 my office and working with DVS and you're right,
23 because things move kind of slow and then we get
24 frustrated. So, I think you know, we have a new
25 Commissioner here and let's build the relationship,

1
2 let's build upon the relationship and if you have
3 anything, you could always CC me in the email, this
4 way I could see what's going on, I could CC Joe.

5 This way we see what's going on. Like when you
6 send DVS an email, let us see it.

7 COCO CULHANE: Right, but I mean, so, for
8 instance, I spoke with someone this morning about the
9 treatment courts and I said, are you, you know, there
10 was this announcement that in July an assessment was
11 done and they're working on what to do to support
12 them and I said, has anything actually happened and
13 they said, no.

14 So, I'm not going to email someone and say -

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Of course not.

16 COCO CULHANE: You know what I mean, so I think
17 it's just a question of a refocusing and I think
18 we're at that point and I think that everyone is
19 excited about that.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, okay.

21 COCO CULHANE: And also, I just want to add the
22 discharge upgrade issue. The Mayor did announce
23 supporting that, which is fantastic and the 15
24 percent, it's much higher I think in the city and
25 these veterans have been left behind and both DVS and

1
2 everyone's commitment to this population is much
3 appreciated.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, thank you Coco.

5 CHARLOTTE MARTIN: Good afternoon, my name is
6 Charlotte Martin and I work at the Intrepid, Sea, Air
7 & Space Museum.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great place.

9 CHARLOTTE MARTIN: Yes, thank you. Please come
10 and I work there as Senior Manager of Access
11 Initiatives. I have the privilege of overseeing the
12 Museum's Veterans Access Initiative for which we
13 offer a range of programs and resources for current
14 and former service members and their families.

15 I do want to take a moment to acknowledge the
16 generous financial and advisory support of the City
17 Council Committee on Veterans. So, thank you to
18 Chair Deutsch, Council Members Ampry-Samuel, Vallone,
19 Eugene and Maisel and the Committee Staff for your
20 ongoing efforts to connect veterans with one another
21 and with cultural resources, like the Intrepid
22 Museum.

23 At the Intrepid Museum, our mission is to promote
24 the awareness and understanding of history, science
25 and service in order to honor our heroes, educate the

1
2 public, and inspire our youth. Centered on a former
3 Navy aircraft carrier, we have long engaged veterans
4 through Veterans Day, Memorial Day events, Fleet week
5 activities, a robust volunteer program and free
6 admission for veterans.

7 In fall of 2015, we extended these efforts with
8 the launch of free military family program. The
9 welcome act of military families looking for an
10 opportunity to explore the city, recently returned
11 veterans seeking a way to spend time and reconnect
12 with family. Older veterans sharing their military
13 experience with grandchildren for the first time and
14 gold star families looking for a positive experience
15 after loss.

16 At the same time, we started offering free tours
17 to a PTS support group at the Bronx VA and we now
18 offer free tours to any New York City based veterans
19 organization. We expanded to offering Intrepid
20 afterhours, evening programs exclusively for current
21 and former service members with behind the scenes
22 opportunities, better and led creative workshops,
23 catered dinner and plenty of bonding across branches,
24 service eras and post service experience.

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2 We now also offer special veterans plus programs
3 including film screenings, performances, a pride
4 event and now a book club for veterans and their
5 guests. And we offer vet video chats, interactive
6 live tours over video chat for veterans. Local and
7 far away otherwise unable to visit the museum.

8 Last November, we hosted our first ever veterans
9 job and resource fair which also featured workshops
10 on networking, resume writing and other skills.
11 We've benefited from staff trainings led by experts
12 at the NYU Langone's, Cohen Military Family Center
13 and the New York Presbyterian Military Family
14 Wellness Center. And from the advice and feedback of
15 our standing council veteran advisors. I'll note
16 that we always have a resource table at our programs
17 and we're happy to add more.

18 Through this all, we have developed a close and
19 fruitful relationship with DVS. We were honored to
20 be the venue for the signing of the bill that
21 officially created DVS out of the Mayor's Office of
22 Veterans Affairs and also, to be the venue for the
23 recent announcement of the transition from
24 Commissioner Sutton to Commissioner Hendon.

1
2 Since we started our Council of Veteran Advisors,
3 we have always had a veteran representative of DVS on
4 the Council, sharing feedback on program ideas and
5 connecting us with resources. Both Commissioners and
6 their staff have been responsive to our questions and
7 ideas and have shared our programs by their
8 newsletter and social media.

9 They have been advocates for the important role
10 cultural organizations in the arts can and should
11 play in the lives of veterans and their families and
12 in serving as foundations for community, which we
13 agree with and greatly appreciate.

14 DVS and the City Council recognition of how
15 cultural experiences can strengthen veteran
16 communities and encourage personal growth has been
17 instrumental in the expansion and deepening of the
18 Intrepid Museum's programs and participants over the
19 years and I know other museums are taking notice.

20 We believe DVS is a critical agency for all these
21 reasons. We are hopeful it continues to be
22 adequately funded and managed in order that it can
23 continue to have the proper resources to help serve
24 our veteran and other organizations that serve
25 veterans as collective programming matures.

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Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you and also, I want to thank you for hosting the seniors. Every year we have about 150 seniors that attend Intrepid, so thank you for that.

CHARLOTTE MARTIN: It's our pleasure.

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Any questions? Joe Hunt.

JOE HUNT: Thank you Chairman Deutsch and Council Member Ampry-Samuel for this opportunity to testify regarding New York City's Department of Veteran Services.

Going forward, my name is Joe Hunt; I am a U.S. Army Veteran and I serve as the Director of the Veterans Mental Health Coalition of New York City. The coalition is made up of over 850 members representing 388 different organizations that serve the military connected community in New York City.

The coalition is administered by vibrant emotional health. Vibrant was formerly known as the Mental Health Association of New York City. To respectful of time, I'll get to the point, I'm going to give you the cliff notes of my testimony. You have my full testimony in front of you.

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2 For the past four years, the Veterans Mental
3 Health Coalition has made the point in all of our
4 testimony to City Council Committees on veterans and
5 on mental health and in meetings with DVS. That
6 generally half of all service members returning to
7 civilian life in New York State, return with
8 psychological industries or substance abuse issues.
9 Yet, only one third seeks treatment.

10 For those who may not have served in the
11 military, it may be surprising to learn that another
12 major factor effecting the emotional wellbeing of
13 veterans is transitioning back to civilian life.
14 There leaving supportive communities built upon
15 rigorous regimen and established supports and are
16 basically cut loose to fend for themselves upon
17 separation.

18 Jim McDonough who I think many of us know, the
19 Director of New York State Division of Veteran
20 Services, compared transitioning to becoming homeless
21 and unemployed all at once. Imagine that.

22 There are two primary reasons why veterans don't
23 address their behavioral health and emotional health
24 needs. First, the stigma associated with mental
25 health treatment still persists. Second, their

1
2 emotional wellbeing is not their top priority. The
3 report from the Institute of Veterans and Military
4 Families, which supports Vet Connect and six other
5 coordination centers like Vet Connect, indicated the
6 most frequently requested services are housing,
7 employment and benefits navigation. These services
8 accounted for 49 percent of all requests. Only one
9 percent of nearly 65,000 requests were for mental
10 health or substance use services.

11 Given this information, and I've said this before
12 in testimony, given this information it's reasonable
13 to estimate that 67 of 100 veterans who have
14 clinically significant behavioral health needs are
15 initially seeking service from non-mental health
16 providers.

17 Non-mental health providers are an important
18 gateway to connecting veterans to behavioral self-
19 services. In connection with that, we're working
20 with the Department of Veteran Services to help
21 promote mental health first aid for non-mental health
22 providers as well as those providers who are part of
23 the Vet Connect network. And early intervention is
24 our best opportunity to reduce deaths by suicide
25

1
2 among our brothers and sisters who have served in the
3 military.

4 Vibrant and Veterans Mental Health Coalition
5 supported the creation of New York City's Department
6 of Veteran Services to meet the needs of New York
7 City's veterans, national guard service members,
8 their families and caregivers and we applauded DVS's
9 acquisition of Vet Connect. Vet Connect is a
10 valuable resource for information and referrals that
11 link New York City connect community to an array of
12 service providers across a wide variety of sectors.
13 To maximize the potential that Vet Connect hold,
14 requires increased community awareness of its service
15 and the inclusion of more providers in its network.

16 Vet Connects enormous potential as a tool for
17 making more informed decisions can not be overstated.
18 Today, most of the research that we see from the VA
19 and elsewhere is at least two years old. Vet
20 Connects ability to collectively report timely
21 relevant information about the number of requests,
22 the types of services requested, as well as the
23 source of the request and referrals is invaluable.

24 Armed with this information, DVS and community
25 based providers will be better able to respond to the

1 demand for different types of services. Identify the
2 types of clients requesting services and develop
3 strategies for early intervention and the reduction
4 in deaths by suicide and measure their outcomes.
5

6 The Veterans Mental Health Coalition holds great
7 hope for Commissioner James Sutton and the DVS team
8 but hope is not enough. We'd like to see DVS one,
9 publicly communicate its goals and regularly report
10 on the key performance indicators it uses to track
11 its performance.

12 Two, work more collaboratively with the community
13 of providers and engage them into achieving these
14 goals. Recruit and onboard more qualified providers
15 in the Vet Connect network to enhance its value and
16 benefit to the community.

17 Four, actively encourage Vet Connect providers to
18 make all behavioral health referrals through the Vet
19 Connect network.

20 And five finally, establish a robust
21 communications campaign to ensure that New York
22 City's military connected community is aware of Vet
23 Connect and the types of services available.

24 Thank you for this opportunity to present the
25 testimony today. I'm happy to answer any questions.

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

142

CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you Joe and I want to thank the Commissioner for staying throughout the hearing and I want to thank all the advocates who taking of your time to being here today and laughing at my jokes. Thank you very much. Oh, there we go again.

So, thanks once again, and God Bless the United States of America and God Bless you all. The meeting is adjourned. [GAVEL]

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 1, 2018