

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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June 23, 2014  
Start: 10:34 a.m.  
Recess: 1:33 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway-Committee Rm.  
16th Floor

B E F O R E: ERIC ULRICH  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Fernando Cabrera  
Alan Maisel  
Paul Vallone  
Andrew Cohen

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

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Ed Schloeman  
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Jacqueline Torres  
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Reverend Robert B. Farley, PhD.  
Member  
Veterans are Still Warriors, Veterans  
Serving Veterans

Lionelle Hamanaka  
Member  
Military Families Speak Out, NYC

Edward Daniels  
Chairman  
Incarcerated Veterans Consortium, Inc

Paul Schubert  
NYC Resident  
Re: Leslie Goldberg, Vietnam Veteran

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Good morning.

I'm Council Member Andrew Cohen, acting chair at the moment of the Veterans Affairs Committee. We should be joined shortly by Chair Eric Ulrich and I just want to acknowledge my colleagues: Council Member Cabrera was here someplace, Council Member Maisel and Council Member Vallone. I'm going to call up the Commissioner to give his testimony and Council Member Ulrich will give his opening statement when he gets here. So do we have Commissioner Holliday? Good morning, sir. How are you? Okay, I'm going to... [off mic] just wait a minute, right? [background voice] You can do it.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, this is Committee Counsel Kelly Taylor. Can you both raise your right hand? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before the committee today and to respond honestly to council member questions? Okay, you can begin.

[Pause]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Okay, I'm good. Good morning, sir and all the members of the Veterans Committee. My name is Terrance Holliday

and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. With me I have Latisha Russaw. She is my military liaison and she's also an Air Force veteran. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and testify about MOVA's operations and the role of our office.

The Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs was established by Local Law 53 in 1987 and advises the Mayor on issues and initiatives impacting the veteran and military community. MOVA works closely with the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, city agencies, veteran organizations, area military commanders and other stakeholders to assist active duty service members, veterans, their dependents and survivors; also, to assist Reservists and National Guard members. MOVA is one of only a handful of city-level veterans' constituent services agencies throughout the United States.

Today, there are approximately 210,000 veterans of all generations residing in the five boroughs. Female veterans number 11 percent or close to 24,000. Included in the veteran community are friends, family members and associates and

others. This effectively increases the community we serve to approximately one million individuals. It is anticipated that New York State will welcome 44,000 veterans after combat operations cease overseas and as the Department of Defense drawdown continues over the next few years. This number will include military members separating or retiring to New York City, heading home or selecting New York City as their next destination in life.

The veteran community in New York City is extremely diverse and complex. Our veteran community consists of those who served during the eras of World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War, including Operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield, Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and New Dawn. During combat operations in Afghanistan, in addition to those concluded in December 2011 in Iraq, the United States witnessed the largest wartime mobilization of the United States military reserve forces since World War II. The New York National Guard, the US Marines, Army, Navy and Coast Guard reservists headquartered in the Greater Metropolitan Area made

significant contributions to the overall combat presence. These veterans will, immediately and over time, present the most significant demand for services and reintegration for support. This level of sustained combat operations witnessed the loss of 92 New Yorkers since 2002, the last of which was Army Staff Sergeant Michael Ollis of Staten Island in 2013.

As a constituent services agency, MOVA provides advocacy, referral and short-term case management services to veterans, their families and dependents in an effort to ensure that they are aware of and have access to VA and city services. MOVA continuously strives to improve systems that enhance veterans' knowledge and access to all available city services. It is important to note that MOVA, unlike the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, services all veterans, regardless of the condition of their discharge.

As a part of its mission, MOVA coordinates the Veterans Advisory Board, the VAB. The VAB advises the Commissioner of MOVA in all matters concerning veterans. It consists of nine members, five of whom are appointed by the Mayor;



four by the Speaker of the New York City Council. The Board meets quarterly, maintains a record of its deliberations, determines its own rules and procedure and submits an annual report of its activities to the Mayor and the City Council. At my direction, the MOVA website is now providing more detail about the VAB for the public.

In addition to the Mayoral appointed VAB, MOVA established a Women's Advisory Committee in 2012 to address the unique needs of female veterans. This committee consists of veterans and non-veterans, active and well-versed in issues affecting this community. The activities of the Women's Advisory Committee are coordinated by MOVA military liaison Latisha Russaw. There are eight volunteer members currently serving on this committee.

MOVA oversees the allocation of space to veteran service organizations on the third floor of 346 Broadway and actually we had just moved from the eighth floor to the third floor about 60 days ago. Currently, there are 16 veteran service organization housed at 346 Broadway. These organizations have 501(c)3 status, they are guests

of the Mayor's Office and are provided office and meeting space at no cost. Additionally, several other veteran organizations continue to use MOVA resources for meetings and communications only.

MOVA staff is currently comprised of five full-time staff members, three grant-funded Benefit Counselors and two New York City Civic Corps members. In addition to MOVA's many projects and initiatives, these employees work on a day-to-day basis with veterans who call the office or walk in seeking assistance and services such as burial assistance, housing, benefits and employment. Today, I'm going to discuss a few of our successful programs and initiatives.

The Counselor Initiative: In 2013, in order to address the US Department of Veterans Affairs claims backlog, MOVA received a grant from a private funder through the Robin Hood Foundation to hire three Veteran Benefits Counselors. This initiative is a "boots on the ground" approach to addressing the VA backlog by providing trained Benefit Counselors to assist veterans in preparing and filing VA claims for compensation quickly and accurately. The VA system can be a maze that many

1 veterans are unable to navigate on their own.  
2 Veterans often wait years for their claims to be  
3 adjudicated if they are not properly filed. By  
4 having trained counselors on staff, MOVA is able to  
5 serve veterans, their dependents and families in  
6 obtaining federal benefits. Despite the delay in  
7 accreditation due to the government shutdown in the  
8 fall, counselors have conducted outreach with  
9 hundreds of veterans by attending events and  
10 speaking engagements in the New York City area.  
11 Counselors work out of CUNY and non-profit partner  
12 locations in Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn. Since  
13 official case tracking began in December, the three  
14 counselors have provided one-on-one counseling to  
15 over 150 veterans and filed 60 claims for  
16 compensation or pensions on their behalf. We are  
17 beginning to experience the success with awards for  
18 increased benefits and pensions. The \$250,000  
19 funding through Robin Hood will be exhausted on  
20 July 31st, 2014.

22 We have another outstanding program for  
23 the indigent unclaimed veterans. We call it  
24 Unclaimed Indigent Burial Programs, but these are  
25 veterans who died without resources. I hate the

word "indigent," but they're basically veterans who are left unclaimed after they pass. MOVA, in partnership with the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and the Public Administrator developed a program to bury the dignified remains of indigent and unclaimed veterans in national cemeteries. Veterans completing an honorable period of service with any branch of the military are generally authorized to receive Final Military Honors, called FMH. FMH consists of burial with a flag, coffin, two members of the military, including one member of the decedent's branch of service and the playing of Taps. This service is executed with the pro bono support of organizational friends such as the Catholic War Veterans, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Vietnam Veterans of America, Rolling Thunder, Dignity Memorial Chapels, the Missing America Project and others. The person who handles this for MOVA; it's really a one person operation; that's Inez Dawn [phonetic] and we have this process down pretty pat and thanks to the collaboration of all of these individuals and

Inez's overall coordination, New York City's honored 269 veterans since 2008.

MOVA Agency Liaisons: MOVA compiles and coordinates one specific liaison from each city agency to assist with veteran matters. MOVA's liaisons are also available as a resource on veteran matters to members of other city agencies. In a new initiative, MOVA has assigned a liaison to each of the city borough presidents to work on a local level assisting staff with veterans' issues. In addition to providing information to the liaisons, MOVA has provided New York City agencies with US Department of Labor training on the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act called USERRA. USERRA is a federal law that prohibits discrimination and ensures job protection for members of the Armed Forces, Reserves and National Guard in their civilian careers. It establishes a cumulative length of time that an individual may be absent from work for military duty and retain employment rights. USERRA prohibits employers from discriminating against members of the Uniformed Services. MOVA is an important resource for information on USERRA, the

city agencies and the public. MOVA has been able to resolve Human Resources issues for New York City agencies by having direct contact with commanders and military staff, thus expediting fair and reasonable decisions at lower levels, saving time, money and inconvenience for all parties concerned.

We have our Veterans' Clothing Closets. We developed this in 2011 and again, I have to credit Latisha Russaw and Inez Dawn for making this work, but we established at MOVA a Suit Drive for veterans where we seek to provide veterans transitioning into the workplace with suits and business attire for interviews. Since its inception, MOVA has provided 352 men and 45 women with suits and workplace attire. Through donation programs and our Suit Drive, we've acquired suits, shirts, ties, skirts and shoes for men and women seeking employment. In addition, MOVA hosts a Casual Clothing Flea Market for veterans and their families whenever we have a surplus of materials that are not suitable for employment.

Most of our clients are referred to MOVA by Workforce 1 and other partner organizations assisting veterans in their job hunt. By providing

the service, MOVA enhances collaborations with other agencies and is able to build partnerships with non-profit service organizations. In 2013, MOVA partnered with the History Channel to provide veterans with \$50 gift cards from Macy's to supplement the suits they receive from MOVA. Staff screened each eligible recipient to ensure they complied with the History Channel's income requirements and standards. In total, MOVA distributed 96 gift cards totaling \$4,800 to veterans in need. I would like to add; it's not here; is that as we're doing these programs, we have other meat and potatoes programs that we're doing, so in the middle of handling a case or a housing issue, a veteran shows up with an appointment and needs a suit and they break off to make sure that person gets measured and that properly things are done, so that's something to consider.

Coordination of City Services for Veterans: The US Department of Veterans Affairs has made it a priority to reduce and eventually eliminate veterans' homelessness by 2015. MOVA works in conjunction with the New York City

Department of Homeless Services to ensure homeless veterans are receiving proper placement in the city's shelter system, including the city's two veteran shelters. MOVA also refers veterans to case managers at non-profits, veteran service organization and Supportive Services for Veteran Families, the SSVF program, which provides services for low-income veterans and their families having difficulty affording permanent housing.

MOVA has made it a priority to assist veterans in obtaining permanent housing. Last year, MOVA pushed for preference for veterans in Mitchell-Lama housing. Most recently, New York has become a participant in the US Department of Veterans Affairs-Mission Home: 25 Cities Initiative. This Mayoral initiative is designed to assist New York City in meeting the federal goals of ending veteran homelessness by 2015. MOVA will be working with other city agencies and organizations to meet this goal at the conclusion of the program. I want to go off line for a minute and whatever help you can give us to get veterans preferences with Mitchell-Lama and the Mitchell-Lama housing within your respective districts and



those of your colleagues', it would be very, very helpful.

Another way MOVA has been working to reduce veteran homelessness is by addressing veteran unemployment. While nationally we have seen veterans doing slightly better than their non-veteran counterparts, veteran unemployment is still on the rise in New York City. According to the New York State Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for veterans over the past 12 months was averaged to be about 11.7 percent in New York City. Based upon previous trends, New York generally has a higher unemployment rate than the rest of the country among veterans and non-veterans alike.

MOVA has hosted job fairs with the New York City Department of Small Business Services and also the state and coordinated with Workforce 1 to connect veterans with services to assist in their job search. Workforce 1 employs veteran specialists in each of the boroughs assigned to assist veterans directly with their employment search. MOVA also works closely with non-profits and veteran service organizations on job placement, training programs, resume preparation and by

1 providing clients with professional attire suitable  
2 for employment, as I discussed previously. MOVA  
3 also coordinates services with the New York City  
4 Human Resources Administration to assist veterans  
5 in need of public and food assistance.  
6

7 Veterans Treatment Courts: And I'm  
8 very excited about the Veterans Treatment Courts  
9 because I think that that's a really good way to  
10 go, alright. MOVA's a stakeholder in all three  
11 Veteran Treatment Courts in the city. There's the  
12 one that was recently established in the Bronx.  
13 Latisha Russaw is a stakeholder there and she's  
14 providing significant input into how they work and  
15 they look to MOVA as a resource. The Brooklyn  
16 Treatment Court, the Treatment Court in Brooklyn,  
17 is outstanding and as is the one in Queens. The  
18 Veteran Treatment Courts are a hybrid court which  
19 functions as an alternative to incarceration for  
20 veterans who have been accused of non-violent  
21 offenses. Veterans in Treatment Court are  
22 required to attend court appearances and treatment  
23 sessions and they are provided with mentors to help  
24 them get back on track. The Court is regularly  
25 provided with updates on the veterans' progress. A

MOVA staff member, Latisha, currently sits on the Board of the Bronx Veterans Court and was instrumental in its development.

I have recently been appointed to the Mayor's Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System. Over the next three months as the Task Force continues its work, I believe some of the same methods of responding to the needs of veterans in these Treatment Courts will serve as a successful example in addressing behavioral health in the criminal justice system.

We have a number of special events and partnerships. MOVA facilitates and participates in many events throughout New York City, such as the Mayor's Veterans Day Breakfast, the Veterans Day Parade, Memorial Day Parades and Fleet Week. In the past, MOVA has hosted job fairs and housing fairs for veterans. Though our current office location is not conducive to these events, we hope to reinstate them after our move to 1 Centre Street, which will occur about this time next year. MOVA staff often performs outreach and represents the office at citywide fairs and events.

In another initiative, MOVA has helped shape the Medical Strategic Legal Program in New York City biannually. In a program sponsored by the US Army Surgeon General, American and Foreign medical officers attend training sessions and seminars to discuss best practices and also to showcase what we do in New York. MOVA has partnered with the FDNY Fire Academy to host a seminar on New York City agencies and disaster management. Past participants have included MOVA, OEM, the FDNY Training Division, New York City Service, the Harlem Vet Center and the FDNY EMS Command. What was interesting is that they have a subway system set up in the Training Academy and it was the first time I ever saw it in terms of getting people in and out and then about a week or so later, the F train thing happened and 1,000 people were evacuated safely.

MOVA has also collaborated with Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons to host professional discussions on subjects such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury and Military Sexual Trauma. These discussions have been designed to alert medical and mental health

providers to some of the issues they will experience as our service members seek treatment in civilian facilities.

MOVA has also hosted two Black History Month events to great success. It is my hope that we are able to continue successful programming such as these events, especially as we look to implement new events honoring women and other groups in the military.

So in conclusion, let me just say that over the past few years, MOVA has fostered active partnerships with agencies, non-profit and for-profit organizations to ensure that first-class services are available to New York City veterans. As we represent constituents that are in need of assistance, our successes are large and small. I hope this gives you a glimpse of what we're doing at MOVA and I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you and share both our accomplishments and our vision. I'd be happy to answer your questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you for your testimony, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Yes, sir.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I do have a couple of questions. Last year, the Council passed a Local Law requiring the city to name veterans liaisons in each city agency and I think your testimony touched on that.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Yes, sir.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And make these liaisons available for periodic training by MOVA. Have you conducted any training since this law was enacted?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Yes, sir, we did. Actually, the groundwork for that was the Executive Order 110 and we just continued to build upon that, so what we do... December/January taking into retirements; people leaving that we reach out to the agencies to make sure that they're current and we brought the agency liaisons in for training. When was that, January?

LATISHA RUSSAW: Yes.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: In January. They were brought in in Jan... and we're just going to do it on an annual basis and if there's something else that we need to do we'll... you

1 know, we just know how to reach out to them and get  
2 them.

3  
4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Could you just  
5 explain a little bit about how these liaisons work  
6 with an agency, perhaps like the Department of  
7 Homeless Services; how the liaison between your  
8 agency and the liaison now for the Department of  
9 Homeless Service works, for example?

10 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Well, the  
11 liaison is supposed to be someone who is at a  
12 high... is performing at a very high level in the  
13 agency; not performing at, but is occupying a very  
14 high level thing. So what you're supposed to be  
15 able to do is pick up the phone and call and say  
16 look, I have a veteran who's having a problem, say  
17 with the Department of Finance. There's a question  
18 about a deferment... not a deferment, his tax bill,  
19 okay or sanitation is something that's going on and  
20 we get a lot from Park... not a lot, but every once  
21 in a while you get something from Parks, so you  
22 call somebody. You call that agency liaison and  
23 the liaison is supposed to react to it, contact the  
24 people and get us that information that every  
25 citizen would be getting anyhow or is supposed to

1 be getting, but we get it a lot faster and that's  
2 sort of like what we do and the names are posted on  
3 the website, okay and we... I don't know if we've  
4 updated them currently, but we certainly did in the  
5 first quarter. When was the last time? Okay, so  
6 they've been updated quarterly; they're current.  
7 So those are the folks who represent those  
8 departments and when we don't get an answer and it  
9 may be that you have somebody who's decided to go  
10 on a round the world vacation, then the phone call  
11 is made from the Commissioner's office or from the  
12 Commissioner like what's happening with this and we  
13 get our response. And generally, the responses are  
14 very quick; they're very substantive and I think it  
15 fulfills the requirement.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: You also talked  
18 in your testimony about Veterans Treatment Courts.  
19 How is a veteran identified in these courts so that  
20 someone knows that this is available to them if  
21 they're a veteran and they're interfacing with the  
22 courts? How do they know that there's... that this  
23 separate court exists for them?

24 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: That is...  
25 well, you couldn't have asked me a better question,



1 right? Well, part of the problem that we have in  
2 New York City is that veterans have got to self-  
3 identify for everything and I think that is so  
4 stupid, alright? Veterans... we should... if we're  
5 providing services we should be asking the  
6 question, not veterans. I'm a veteran. I'm an old  
7 guy, so everybody... Vince McGowan's an old guy,  
8 right? But when we say we're a veteran that's what  
9 they expect us to see. That's what they expect,  
10 but if you go in and you serve... once you serve a  
11 day, 18, 19-years old, you're a veteran, okay? So  
12 what happens is that somebody along the line,  
13 whether it's the police officer that picks someone  
14 up, okay, they've got to establish that that  
15 individual is a veteran as they're processing them  
16 through the arraignment... the pre-arrest and then  
17 the arraignment process and then once they do that,  
18 if they determine that this is the type of an  
19 offense that you'd wind up in the Veterans Court,  
20 then they move to get this person in there. So  
21 they get into the Veterans Court, alright, and then  
22 once they get into the Veterans Court, if they're  
23 approved to get in you know, the process they plead  
24 to a misdemeanor, okay, and they plead to this  
25

1 misdemeanor and then whatever services that they  
2 need it's coordinated by the courts. I know that  
3 if Joe Madonia in Brooklyn and Judge Hirsch and  
4 Maritza Karagiorgos in Queens, they make certain  
5 that if it's a housing issue; if it's a mediation  
6 issue; if it's stuff like that that they need it  
7 and then at the completion of it, they... and they  
8 graduate from the program, alright, then their  
9 record... the misdemeanor is expunged, I believe  
10 the records are sealed, okay, and you know, they're  
11 not in the criminal justice system. That can... by  
12 being convicted and going into the criminal justice  
13 system will affect a lot of things; VA benefits,  
14 you know, employment, a number of other... so by  
15 keeping them out of the criminal justice system,  
16 that's the big deal. So the question is  
17 everybody's got to ask. You know, I attended  
18 something at the New York Bar Association... the  
19 VA, it was a VA presentation and quite a few people  
20 mentioned to the Bar you know, at the defendant's  
21 Bar if you're client is a veteran, you need to make  
22 certain that folks know about that as you're going  
23 through it, so hopefully, the more knowledge that's  
24

out there the more you know, people will do; will react to it.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Can I jump in on that? Since we're talking about the Treatment Courts...

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: [interposing]  
Mm-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: What's the next step? I mean I'm an attorney for almost 25 years. The Queens County Bar Association's never reached out to me on anything like this, so we're going to have to have some coordination with the Office of Court Administration, the Bar...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Associations, the District Attorneys' Offices. I mean it's one thing to have Veteran Treatment Court, but it's another thing to actually get this thing moving. So what is your plan to get past that first step of identifying a veteran and actually getting them to this court?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Well, I think it's a two-pronged thing, alright? I mean it's probably multi-pronged, but I'm thinking in two. I don't think that it should be left to the veteran to self-identify that they're a veteran, but then also I think it's a communication and education process. You get out to the various Bar Associations; you make certain that... you make certain that they know about Veterans Court; that you input stuff to them for the information that they send out to the various members and then that's shared with the Bar Association and I think that that's a really good step to do...

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Are we doing that?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I'm not.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, then who is?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I have no idea. I'm not... okay, I do it when I can and in public forums when I go out and I speak, I speak to this, but the first time that I had an opportunity to speak to a Bar Association was Manhattan. I wasn't

invited as a guest. I attended something else and during the Q&A I mentioned that you know, but I think that's something that we have to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, yeah, i...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I don't think; I know we do.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, I mean the attorney side of me is saying I think that's a great idea. I think there are many within the Bar Associations that would be proud to assist with the veterans. Does the Veteran Treatment Court have jurisdiction to offset or take precedence of a non-violent situation that'd actually be binding?

'Cause my concern is what is the actual... is the decision made within the court or is the decision made in accordance with Civil Court, Housing Court, Supreme Court? Is it a separate body itself or...

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: It's a separate part. Sir, I'd have to get you an answer on that. It's a separate part. I know in Queens it's Judge Hirsch and once a non-violent crime is referred to her, they take it over. That's my understanding,

so whatever they do with respects to that particular offense is binding.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So maybe we can have a follow-up on that.

COMMISSONER HOLLIDAY: [interposing]  
Yeah, absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Because then we could include the various Bar Associations...

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: [interposing]  
Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: The OCA and this is something that we can assist and...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: That would be absolutely great.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think this would be a great way to start next year with getting... expanding these services. I think that would be something the Council and the Mayor's Office could work together.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: There is a wide array of resources out there that we can tap into on that. One of the things I had proposed

1 because it sounded like your... the point of entry,  
2 the ID, I had proposed a bill this year for  
3 veterans ID cards.  
4

5 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So as the  
7 municipal ID cards are progressing, the thought is  
8 either to combine the veterans ID card into the  
9 municipal ID card or have a separate veterans'  
10 identification card. I just want to know your  
11 thoughts on that; if that's something that the  
12 agency would support.

13 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I think that  
14 the best... I think number one, I would submit  
15 any... I'll support anything that's reasonable that  
16 identifies a veteran as a veteran, okay, but I  
17 think that you have to take a realistic approach  
18 towards what we're doing. The very best  
19 identification card that a veteran can have is his  
20 VA card, alright? I'm a retired Air Force person,  
21 so I have my little retired card, so if I need to  
22 show something, that's what I have. I think that  
23 it might not be a bad thing if you have the  
24 municipal card, and I don't know how you're going  
25 to design it, that maybe you have a check off box

1  
2 for a veteran because if someone has... if we have  
3 a whole bunch of different cards I can see 20 years  
4 from now we may have so many cards that we say hey,  
5 let's go back to one card you know, like that  
6 type... I don't know, but I think if we can have a  
7 check off with a city ID card for people that need  
8 them, I don't see that as a bad idea.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, that's  
10 good 'cause we're trying to push that.

11 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Yeah, I mean  
12 I...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Alright,  
14 let's just touch on the budget for a moment. So  
15 you know, we had tried to expand the budget an  
16 extra \$400,000. I just wanted to know your  
17 position on what we could have done or why it  
18 didn't actually get expanded. Are you comfortable  
19 with the existing budget for MOVA or do you see  
20 increases necessary?

21 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Sir, I was  
22 appointed to this job in January 2011. I  
23 haven't... whenever I needed something I got it; I  
24 got those resources from a city agency. I really  
25 haven't run into a situation where I have needed



1 money to get anything done. Alright now, everyone  
2 talks about the budget. yeah, I have a budget with  
3 salary; the salaries in there and stuff, but if I  
4 needed something I got... if I found... my  
5 background in the United States Air Force was that  
6 I didn't really have a budget to hold events or to  
7 sort of... I found ways to make those things happen  
8 and that's what we've been doing here, so I said  
9 you know, like if we need money, what do I need the  
10 money for? Alright, there are eight...

11 [crosstalk]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So you're  
13 comfortable with the existing budget without...

14 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I can always  
15 use money. Okay, I can always use money, as we all  
16 can, but I will continue to make things happen  
17 until things change.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, then  
19 you're ...

20 [crosstalk]

21 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: And that's all  
22 I can tell you.

23 [crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Comfortable that MOVA not existing on its own and being through a different department?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I have some thought... I still have some thoughts about that. I... I have thoughts about that. I'm a Mayoral agency. I work for the Mayor. I'm comfortable with that. If there's a better way to do it, then we can explore that. I mean that's really all I can say about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, with the size of the budget we can't. I mean MOVA cannot exist on its own unless it becomes in all true in purposes its own existing agency with its own budget; with its own priorities for services and programs, not just staff. I mean I would like to see an advocacy where you're telling me that you want it to be on its own; that you want an increased staff and you want a budget that can reach the thousands of veterans in this state that need the help. I mean I don't think relying on help from agencies when you ask for it is the way to go. That's my...

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: You know, I'm getting the work... no, I'm not... sir, you said the state. I'm talking about the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well...

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Okay, no, I understand, but what I'm saying is the... what we are trying to progress is we're moving the ball down the field. It's not creating any issue for me to continue operating the way that I'm doing. Is there a better way? There's always a better way and I would like to continue the level of services. I would like to expand on the level of services. If that means we need some money, then I need some money, but I need to expand on the level of services. Now, when we talk about... my job is required, as the Commissioner, I'm grandfathered into it for a little bit in that I have to receive the same type of training that the veteran service organizations have and I have that. Latisha Russaw is now an accredited veteran service officer in the state, alright and then Inez Dawn, also in my office, okay, is just awaiting the second part of that to get accredited. In fact, I'm waiting for the second part to get accredited myself, which is

1 just like a walk-through where you're shadowing  
2 people. So what I would like to see us do is to  
3 continue with those services that we are providing  
4 and to increase them because that's what we've been  
5 doing since I came on board.

6  
7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I mean  
8 our chair has just showed up.

9 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: What is the  
11 current budget breakdown between salary and  
12 services?

13 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Services  
14 virtually nothing and everything that I have is  
15 based upon salary and most of the folks... and I  
16 have some people who are on loan from other  
17 agencies, alright, but everything that I have we're  
18 talking about salary. I'm not talking about  
19 services.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, then  
21 that's my point.

22 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: How can we  
24 provide more services if we have no budget for it?  
25

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Well, the only thing I can tell you, sir, is I'm getting the job done using the resources from HRA, DHS. That's what I'm doing and...

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, no one's saying that that's not... you haven't been doing a commendable. We're here to try to do things better and I think the one thing I've learned is how I can wake up today and do something better tomorrow, so...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: If there's a plan that we can start looking at in 2015 and saying okay, let's... what is our outer borough plan? Speaking of which, do we have any officers in the outer boroughs? What is somebody in Queens and Brooklyn and Staten Island supposed to do? What's their... if I have a veteran in Northeast Queens that needs help where are they supposed to go?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: That veteran calls MOVA.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And then what happens?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: And that veteran will call MOVA and what we do at MOVA is to connect to agencies, whether it's a city agency; whether it's a profit; a not-for-profit agency. We reach out to them and we make sure to use connectivity and we try to resolve the problem that way.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Is there an office in the outer borough for them to go to?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Sir, I have four employees besides myself, okay, and I'm stretched...

[Crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So this goes...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Thin...

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Back to my original point though. I mean if we expand the budget we could then have services in outer

boroughs. We can have an office in an outer  
borough; we can have staff; we can have...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Liaisons;  
volunteers, but we don't have that.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Yeah, I don't  
disagree with you on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But you were  
saying you were happy with that. You're content  
with the way...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: No, I didn't  
say I was happy. I'm never happy. I'm an old guy.  
I'm never happy, okay? You give me money and I'll  
find a way to spend it.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well,  
that's...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Okay?

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's the  
spirit I'm looking for. That's...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: You know?

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: What I want  
you to do.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: If you give me  
the money I'll find a way to spend it. I'm  
doing... we're trying to fight the good fight with  
what we have right now and what's happening is that  
we've become a product of our own success. Over  
the last two or three years, we're reaching out;  
people know that we're there; they come to us; we  
help them out; we do whatever else we can do and  
success breeds more people picking up the phone and  
calling.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, what  
might be a logical next step? If you were to take  
for what I'm saying that there are folks in outer  
boroughs that would not like to have to come  
Manhattan, what might be the next phase of a plan  
to address that?

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I haven't  
really given it that much thought because it really  
hasn't... it really has not shown up on my radar



1  
2 that if we get a phone call from somebody in Staten  
3 Island that we cannot resolve it with them in  
4 Staten Island or find some other way to do it. I  
5 haven't had anyone to call up and say, "Look, I  
6 need to come in and speak to somebody out here in  
7 Staten Island about some issue." Okay, it just  
8 hadn't appeared, alright, and...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]  
10 Well, how many...

11 [crosstalk]

12 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: I...

13 [crosstalk]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: How many  
15 veterans do we assist on an annual basis?

16 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Last year, we  
17 assisted... we have a constituent database, okay?  
18 In the constituent database we had about 1,300 that  
19 showed up last year and but then we had two people  
20 who were actually working that. Let me give you...  
21 I can give you the... 1,206, okay, but those are  
22 1,206 people who are in our database. I will tell  
23 you that a lot of phone calls... a lot of things  
24 that we get during the course of the day are people  
25 calling up and they want to know who are they

1  
2 supposed to connect to in the VA to find out about  
3 benefits or what... and we just refer those calls  
4 to them, okay? To have someone call up and say, "I  
5 need to actually come in and have face-to-face with  
6 someone and I don't want to come into Lower  
7 Manhattan to meet with folks," it's rare. But now,  
8 one of the things that we did do with the veteran  
9 service offices with the Robin Hood money, we move  
10 them around to different places. We have been  
11 moving them around to different places where  
12 individuals could reach out you know, to them and  
13 maybe what we've done is that we've created a  
14 market and we need to sustain it.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But what's the  
16 plan for when the Robin Hood plan expires July  
17 31st?

18 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Still thinking  
19 about it; still trying to figure out to work it out  
20 and that's all I can really answer you about that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Is that  
22 something we'd like to continue?

23 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Oh, I... yeah,  
24 I'd like to continue the services, I sure would.  
25

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: The... you also mentioned coordinating with... at the end with parades and veteran services and organizations. How does that happen? I mean I know the special events partnership, if you can expand on that.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: When we talk about...

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So that's...

[crosstalk]

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Other...

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So that's not financial assistance 'cause there's no budget for it.

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Oh, no.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So that would just be...

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: No, no.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Navigating through permits and...

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Well, we've developed a good relationship with other agencies; the Mayor's Office of Special Events and they're

just... one of the things that we did not do well for several years was to connect with the veteran service organizations in the five boroughs. We sort of like lost that connection. We have since reconnected and if they have a special event, that special event becomes us. Sometimes it's to help them... help them navigate through the Department of Defense to get certain assets someplace to support their parade. Sometimes it's just to get a Commissioner to come and issue a proclamation or some other things like on the ceremonial side of the fence. We just completed Army Week about two weeks ago; about 10 days ago and we played a part in trying to make that happen. The French have a very active veterans group in New York City. They had a ship, the Lafayette, that was in town and they had a number of things honoring America, honoring French patriots, honoring these other folks who were... and MOVA helped with that. The 369th, the Hell Fighters from Harlem, they're having a tough time right now. Their armory is being renovated and they will probably not be given space in that armory for the Historical Society. That's a very big deal up in Harlem, alright, so

1  
2 they've come to us and you know, I'm going to try  
3 to see to do whatever... just try to do whatever I  
4 can do with that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay, I thank  
6 you. Chair Ulrich is here and he has some  
7 questions.

8 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Yes, sir.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council  
10 Member Vallone. I want to thank the other members  
11 of the committee who were here when I was not, but  
12 I am here now. Commissioner, I apologize to you  
13 and to everyone else who came here to testify that  
14 I am late today, but I did get a chance to review  
15 your testimony and I'm sure that Council Member  
16 Vallone and some of my colleagues had the chance to  
17 touch on some of the issues that are concerning the  
18 veteran population and concerning members of this  
19 committee. Probably the most pressing issue  
20 because we are so close to the budget right now is  
21 what money is going to be in place to fund your  
22 office and some of the veterans initiatives that  
23 we've already funded in the previous fiscal year.  
24 And you know, I really was hoping that you'd have  
25 an answer about this Robin Hood grant; you know,

COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: No, sir, but I'm... I've spoken to them about some proposals for some things that... the bottom line is I don't have an answer for you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright, we are on the cusp of passing the city's budget and my colleagues have been very supportive of the Veterans Initiative, which I've proposed. It's the first one that the Council is picking up in how many years, Kelly? It's been a while; probably six or seven years and we're trying to address some of the issues like unemployment, mental health, legal services you know, for vets. The Council really wants to play a bigger role in supporting a lot of the good work that your office and the state and federal government are doing in assisting our veterans, but it's not nearly enough to do what really needs to be done. And considering the fact that New York City has more veterans living in the five boroughs than some states have in their entire

1 state, you know, that we aren't spending more and  
2 the public hasn't made a stronger commitment to  
3 supporting veterans and services that support  
4 veterans and their families really is a disgrace  
5 you know and the purpose of these hearings is not  
6 to embarrass anybody or make anybody look bad;  
7 certainly not everybody's doing what they can, but  
8 I think that if we could take anything from these  
9 hearings it's that we can all do more.

11 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Mm-hm.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And so if that's  
13 any consolation. I don't know how bad they beat  
14 you up before I got here, but just because people  
15 complain doesn't mean they're unhappy, right?

16 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: No, sir.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, alright, so  
18 I want to thank you for your testimony. If you had  
19 anything else to add before we call up the next  
20 panel, I'd be pleased to hear it.

21 COMMISSIONER HOLLIDAY: Sir, I just  
22 want to thank you very much for you and your staff  
23 and the committee. You're dedicated to making our  
24 commitments real for our veterans. I firmly  
25 believe that. I don't think that other than

1 fatherhood and marriage or whatever it is, but  
2 wearing a uniform and defending the United States  
3 of America is probably the most important thing  
4 that many of us could ever do in life and we owe a  
5 great deal to everyone who served and we just need  
6 to make certain that we're trying our very best to  
7 help them any which way we can. I want to thank  
8 you for these things that you've implemented since  
9 you've come on board and I am speaking for a lot of  
10 folks. I just want to say thank you very much.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: My pleasure and  
13 thank you also to Latisha, right? Thank you.  
14 Okay, why don't we have the next panel come up?  
15 Coco Culhane from the Urban Justice Center for  
16 Veteran Advocacy; Jason Hansman; John Rowan and  
17 Vince McGowan from the Veteran Advisory Board, VAB.  
18 Thank you, Commissioner. [background voice] Yes  
19 and we'll start the clock at three minutes for  
20 each; not three minutes total, and then we'll  
21 follow up with some questions. I know that Council  
22 Member Cabrera was here; also Council Member Maisel  
23 from Brooklyn and Council Member Vallone, who is  
24 seated to my right and it was Council Member Cohen  
25 who was here? Okay, so we had a full house. We



do. They're on the next panel. We do, yep. We have three panels, so this is the first and I'll ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to swear the panel in if you can. Okay well, we'll ask the lawyer to do it. We'll have Kelly Taylor.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can you please all raise your right hand? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before the committee and to respond honestly to council member questions? Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, so we will start with... John, do you want to start? We'll start left to right in no particular order.

JOHN ROWAN: Okay, my name is John Rowan. I'm a Council appointee to the Veterans Advisory Board. I'm the National President and CEO of Vietnam Veterans of America and former Chief Investigator of the former Council Office of Oversight and Investigation, so I'm familiar with this room.

I would like to give you a little history 'cause I think it's important. People tend to forget what the past used to look like. The

Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs has been around since World War II. After World War II, it was a fairly substantial office with offices in each borough, by the way, one of the questions the Councilman asked earlier, and it was a fairly robust agency. It changed significantly in the '70s in the Lindsay Administration, frankly, to respond to the homecoming Vietnam veterans. We were having a lot of problems. There was a lot... unemployment was rampant. There was a whole issue with the Veterans Welfare Agency, et cetera. So Mayor Lindsay created a new Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, which became a very substantial one-stop shopping center in Downtown Brooklyn and they brought in people from all the different agencies at the time; City University, the old Addiction Services Agency, HRA and others and we again, still had offices in each of the boroughs. And unfortunately, that died in the fiscal crisis during the Beame and later Koch Administrations and we ended up with the MOVA we have today, which has started to come back up again and at least we do have a Commissioner title and it's getting some recognition, but it needs to be beefed up

significantly and to respond to Councilman  
Vallone's questions, yes, we need a lot more money.

One of the things that concerns me is  
listening to us being called constituent service  
like you know, the City of New York spends lots of  
money on varying constituencies. I guarantee you  
if I was to parch the city budget and look at money  
going to gays; money going to immigrants; money  
going to minorities in different various programs  
for all of those populations, it would be a  
significant amount of money and that's fine; we  
need to do that, but veterans are yes, a  
constituency, but I would ask you to look at it  
more as almost a revenue sort of program.

The City of New York spends billions  
every year in tax breaks for corporations to bring  
money into the system to beef up the economic  
structure. One of the most significant federal  
expenditures in the City of New York is VA  
benefits. Millions upon millions of dollars pours  
into the city every year for veterans benefits,  
veterans benefits which are spent by those veterans  
in this city, which as you know in the multiplier  
and all that good stuff, creates all kinds of

1 wonderful benefits to the city. A service officer;  
2 the state figured this out years ago; after they've  
3 been working for a couple of years and cases mature  
4 and things go through the process, a good service  
5 rep can earn \$6 million a year in the sense of  
6 bringing \$6 million worth of benefits every year to  
7 individuals, one [chime] service rep. So I would  
8 suggest that a small amount of money spent in that  
9 area by the City of New York; I mean the \$250,000  
10 is a pittance, by the way. It should be a lot more  
11 than that, probably double; could bring in millions  
12 upon millions of dollars to the City of New York  
13 and increase federal benefits for those veterans,  
14 saving them a lot of problems, keeping them out of  
15 the welfare rolls, taking care of them in lots of  
16 different ways. So that's my take this morning.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We'll reserve  
19 questions 'til the panel has completed. Coco?

20 COCO CULHANE: Hi, good morning. Thank  
21 you for having me. My name is Coco Culhane and I'm  
22 the Director of the Veteran Advocacy Project with  
23 the Urban Justice Center. We provide free legal  
24 services to low-income veterans.

I think as the committee moves forward examining how veterans' needs in New York City are going to be addressed and what MOVA's role should be, the first step is obviously to look at what it is now. The City Charter offers a scant 252 words on the role of the Commissioner and the powers and duties enumerated are broad enough that MOVA has the potential to do great things, but as we all know, the office has been underfunded and has ended up serving as a placeholder for a figurehead often, rather than as an agency truly serving our veterans.

The Mayor's budget proposal, which offered a paltry few dollars to MOVA, sent a message I think about the priority of veterans in this city, at least for the administration; however, it doesn't mean that the office can't be effective. It can be a hub for all of the inspiring work that so many organizations are doing in this city. You know, the largest of the challenges being tackled include the backlog, the appalling state of some of the medical centers; luckily, not ours, the unemployment rate and the suicide rates for active duty military and

1 veterans. And one thing I think that all of these  
2 problems have in common are a lack of a coordinated  
3 effort to combat them. New York City is one of the  
4 worst offenders when it comes to this, in my  
5 opinion, and MOVA can lead the way in uniting  
6 initiatives and creating a public awareness  
7 campaign for veterans' resources.

9 I believe that a detailed inventory of  
10 the resources of the city would reveal that there  
11 are hundreds, if not thousands, of programs that  
12 veterans can access, but there's no one place  
13 that's keeping track of everything and MOVA should  
14 be that place. New York City's problem is not a  
15 lack of services. It's a lack of communication and  
16 connection. Take, for example, VA benefits. You  
17 know, I can think of at least 25 organizations that  
18 work on them and there are definitely more in the  
19 city alone that do as well. The problem is that  
20 you know, I'm guessing no one in this room even  
21 could list which ones do applications; which ones  
22 do appeals. There needs to be a centralized place  
23 where veterans can get this information.

24 You know, I know that every time we do  
25 a presentation, we go and we work on different

1 things for different providers. We include lists  
2 of resources and everyone says you know, I had no  
3 idea that existed. That's what our clients tell us  
4 every time we do a referral. You know, I know I've  
5 said these words myself and if someone whose  
6 lifework is to assist veterans is saying something  
7 like that, there's a problem and how is a veteran  
8 supposed to know all the things that they can turn  
9 to?  
10

11 So too many organizations complain that  
12 they can't find veterans and the reality is that  
13 they're not looking and it's our job, I think  
14 everyone in this room, [chime] to conduct outreach  
15 and it should be MOVA's job to create a public  
16 awareness campaign. There should be ads in the  
17 subway telling veterans to call MOVA for assistance  
18 and they should be able to send them to the right  
19 place without fail. It should be a centralized  
20 place for both providers and veterans to connect.  
21 CUNY campuses should be plastered with flyers, city  
22 websites should be up to date and easy to navigate  
23 with detailed lists of resources. MOVA is in a  
24 unique position to be a starting point for every  
25 veteran, whether he's been for 50 years and now

needs intensive health care at home or just moved here to start a life and started City College, for example, and needs some GI bill help.

I think throwing money at MOVA and asking them to duplicate services is really not the answer. Of course we need more services, but that's not going to solve the systemic problems. It's not going to stop suicide; it's not going to prevent homelessness and keep veterans in school and that's not to say that they haven't been doing terrific work, the Benefits Counselors in the last year. We refer people to them; they're fantastic. But it's to say that the office as a whole could have a much larger impact I think and utilize its unique position in the community as a central place.

So funding must come with a clear mandate that defines the goals for the office and the changes should leverage the fact that MOVA can play a unique role as a connector. We need to create a sense that New York is truly a place that welcomes those who served and it can't achieve this unless resources are provided and city government actually demonstrates that it's paying attention



and expects results. If I were a veteran starting out in New York right now, I would assume the city doesn't care about me at all and that's a shameful thing that should change. So New York needs to communicate to veterans that their care is a priority and then prove it by helping them to guide and build their lives and...

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Coco.

[crosstalk]

COCO CULHANE: MOVA can do this.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Jason.

JASON HANSMAN: Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, Committee. My name is Jason Hansman and I'm the Senior Program Manager for Mental Health Programs at Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. We were founded in 2004 in New York City and are the first and largest organization for this current generation of veterans and we are the only major veteran service organization that is headquartered here in New York City. In addition to being a staff member, I am also a member of IAVA. I'm a combat veteran serving in the Army from 2000 to 2008, with a combat tour in Iraq in

2004. I also run our case management program, which helps connect veterans across this city to the various resources that help them get their lives back on track.

We want to thank, first of all, the Commissioner for his hard work at MOVA over the last couple years. MOVA has engaged in a number of positive activities over the last couple years, including hosting job fairs and resource fairs. We further applaud MOVA's efforts to assess the veterans' experiences with VA medical centers in New York City, especially given the recent VA crisis.

That being said, there is a great deal of work that continues... or that needs to be done. First and importantly, MOVA lacks clear priorities and goals. In many ways, MOVA is all things to all people, but if everything is a priority, then absolutely nothing is a priority. It is critical that MOVA prioritize and set clear, obtainable goals that are transparent to the veterans' community here in New York City. As the city's representative for veterans, MOVA should also act as a primary convener on veterans' issues within

the city. Its voice has mostly been absent within a number of coalitions that already exist within the city. Additionally, the existing coalitions lack the mandate and the direction that a New York City Commissioner could provide.

IAVA would also like to see continued support for MOVA's Benefits Counselors continue. We applaud the foresight of Robin Hood in the funding of this initiative at MOVA. Removing these three highly qualified Benefits Offices would only hurt our veterans, veterans that already have to wait too long for their benefits, with an average of 164 days here in New York City.

Lastly, MOVA should be at the forefront of bringing veterans to our great city, especially younger veterans. There are many reasons why veterans should be attracted to New York City, from property tax breaks, high basic allowance for housing for students, state tuition benefits and the wealth of opportunities that only a city like New York City can provide. Every veteran in the country should see New York City as a veteran's friendly city and want to spend at least a portion of their life here.

1  
2           Whatever the outcome of this hearing  
3 and the future direction of MOVA, it should be  
4 recognized that MOVA is a very small office. I  
5 think we've heard that a number of times already  
6 today and this office has largely been hamstrung by  
7 a very, very broad mandate and very low direction  
8 and little to no staff and budget to carry out any  
9 sweeping initiatives without heavy commitments from  
10 partners both inside and outside city government.

11           You know, there is no question that we  
12 have a long ways to go for New York City to be the  
13 leading city in the country for veterans. To that  
14 end, IAVA looks to be a resource for this committee  
15 and for MOVA. Every year, IAVA publishes our  
16 yearly policy agenda, which includes  
17 recommendations not just at the national level, but  
18 at the state and local level and is meant to be a  
19 blueprint to solve the most pressing issues facing  
20 veterans. This year, our focus is combating  
21 suicide and we applaud this committee for taking up  
22 that issue at a hearing in April.

23           You know, I'm reminded of one of our  
24 case manager clients, misled by the VA and on the  
25 brink of homelessness, unable to afford his rent or

1  
2 go to work. This would have been a challenging  
3 situation without adding his PTSD and his chronic  
4 pain on top of that. The stakes are incredibly  
5 high, but if there is any city in the world that  
6 can rise to this challenge, it is New York City. I  
7 thank the committee for their time and welcome any  
8 questions.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you and the  
10 last member of the panel, Vince McGowan. [chime]

11 VINCENT MCGOWAN: Thank you, Chairman  
12 Ulrich, for the opportunity to present and thank  
13 you, Member Vallone, for your care and concern for  
14 the veterans, as it was in your family over all  
15 these years. My name is Vince McGowan and I'm a  
16 Mayoral appointee and the Chairman of the Veterans  
17 Advisory Board and I'm the President of the United  
18 War Veterans Council and a life member of Vietnam  
19 Veterans of America and of the American Legion and  
20 the VFW. I've found that the veterans community in  
21 New York City has helped me stay in New York City,  
22 the town which I was born in and raised my three  
23 sons and one of them is a veteran of Iraq and  
24 Afghanistan and he chooses to stay in New York City  
25 also and we find that the work between the City

Council and the veterans community has an ongoing, positive way of reaching our mutual goals, so thank you for convening this meeting.

The Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs was established by Local Law 53 in 1987. The New York City veterans' community has received many veterans from the city agency. The level of attention to the needs of the community at this agency has always reflected its leadership. It does need more financing though for the leadership to achieve the goals that have been set out.

MOVA advises the Mayor on issues and initiatives important to the veterans of the military community. MOVA coordinates with the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, veteran and military organizations and all the stakeholders in the veterans' community.

We were very, very encouraged in the last Mayoral Administration when the leadership of the veterans' community in MOVA was raised to a Commissioner level from a Director level; it was long overdue. MOVA encourages innovative partnerships to ensure creative problem solving.

1 We heard that in the Commissioner's testimony and  
2 he's had to... and his staff has had to be creative  
3 because there has not been enough money in the  
4 programs to achieve the kind of success that we  
5 would all like and I concur with all the members of  
6 this panel who are stating that we need to look at  
7 the funding and increase it to meet the needs.

8 Over the past year, MOVA has  
9 successfully managed the transition... to  
10 transition the community from its historic Veterans  
11 Hall at 346 Broadway into temporary space while the  
12 community prepares to move its office space into  
13 the Municipal Building. The estimated move time is  
14 around this time next year. We really appreciate  
15 the city's accommodating the veterans' community.  
16 We feel that moving into the heart of the New York  
17 City Administration and the Municipal Building will  
18 bring the veterans' community closer to the power  
19 of New York City and all the things that you'll be  
20 hearing today will be closer to being accomplished  
21 because of it.

22 There have been times in the past when  
23 there has been less than adequate participation  
24 between the community and the agency. [chime] The  
25

current administration of MOVA has worked very well throughout the community and has made a positive difference in the attitude of the community towards the agency. Thank you for your attention to the concerns of the veterans' community.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you and...

[crosstalk]

VINCENT MCGOWAN: And I'm ready for questions.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Yeah, before you... before the panel's dismissed I do have a few points and questions that I'd like to ask and bring up. So I have submitted a bill. We haven't had a hearing on it yet; we're still trying to iron out all the kinks. I just want to get your feedback here to basically fold the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs into a new established Department of Veterans Affairs or a Department of Veterans Services. We're going to amend it later on, but... 'cause we don't want to confuse people into thinking that when they contact the city the Department of Veterans Affairs if we have one that they've contacted the VA, so we want to remove that; just semantics, but important nonetheless.



1 So we've talked about that and I hope that that's  
2 helping to raise the dialogue at least  
3 structurally; that the city cares a lot more about  
4 veterans than simply making it a branch of the  
5 Mayor's Office; that we've actually elevated it to  
6 its own agency level. So I mean do any of you...  
7 have any of you read about that; have any feelings  
8 about that; any recommendations about that. Maybe  
9 John, do you want to opine?

11 JOHN ROWAN: That actually is something  
12 we've asked for years. I mean the whole idea of  
13 going from Director to Commissioner was in line  
14 with trying to move that forward.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

16 JOHN ROWAN: We think it would be very  
17 important to do that. By the way, one of the  
18 things when I mentioned earlier about constituent  
19 groups; one of the things about veterans, we are  
20 everybody. We're every race; every creed; every  
21 color and even every sexual orientation, despite  
22 what the old don't ask don't tell had to say. So  
23 we are everybody; we are the city; we are every  
24 citizen and so the idea of creating an office is  
25 fine if it's got something to do and certainly

1 aspects of it, as we mentioned earlier...  
2 [background noise] as was mentioned earlier,  
3 besides the constituent service issue of the idea  
4 of helping people file claims, which would again  
5 be... certainly borough-centric would be an  
6 important aspect of that; would be useful. The  
7 ability to provide and coordinate with the DAs  
8 undersold Vet Court program is going to be very  
9 crucial. And by the way, I'm a little disturbed  
10 that Manhattan and the Bronx is not... the Bronx  
11 is, I gather, just started, but I think Manhattan  
12 and Staten Island still need to get on board with  
13 the vet program; with the Veterans Courts program  
14 and so there's a lot of coordination efforts that  
15 could be utilized by utilizing a Department of  
16 Veterans Services most assuredly. And there are  
17 lots of other services and there are lots of other  
18 programs.

19  
20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Anybody else want  
21 to comment on that? We're trying to fix the  
22 feedback issue, by the way. I know there's a  
23 loud...

24 VINCENT MCGOWAN: Yeah, I think as...  
25

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Why don't we make sure that one is on and the other one is off if we can?

VINCENT MCGOWAN: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: Is that okay?

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Much better.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: You know, we have two dynamics riding here. We have the aging veteran community and we have the incoming young veterans community, so the balance that the city is going to have to find is definitely going to have to be an increase in services because the aging community, which we want to keep here and we're established here and lived here all our lives and we want to be part of the success of the young veterans community that's coming in. We'll require an entire index of everything from jobs to burial services and all the work in between and it would be wonderful if it were funded and wonderful if it were under the control of the City Council and the Mayor of New York.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Go ahead, Jason.

JASON HANSMAN: I would just add one last thing and I think what we've heard so far is that everyone wants MOVA to do more and within the current structure; within the current funding; without money for services, that's nearly impossible. I think they are stretched to their limit, so making a new department out of them and giving them their own dedicated funding, especially for services, I think is critical to the point that Vince just said: there's going to be a lot of folks coming home; a lot of folks coming home after the... not just the drawdown in Afghanistan, but drawdown in forces in general, so having a Mayoral... city department to take care of veterans when they come home is going to be absolutely critical.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's something we're really going to push for in the fall, once you know, the budget is over and we come back into session after the summer vacation and I think it's very important, not simply because of the fact that we want to elevate the level of gravitas for veterans or people that serve veterans, but for the simple fact that we are going to make funding for

1 veterans more readily available. We are going to  
2 streamline the process for funding so it's a lot  
3 easier. Currently, all of your organizations have  
4 to go through DYCD, which is a bureaucratic maze at  
5 best, and they are struggling to fund thousands of  
6 other not-for-profits across the city. If we had a  
7 Department of Veterans Affairs, well then, I can  
8 fund the VVA; I could fund the American Legion; I  
9 can fund the IAVA. I can fund any veterans  
10 organization that is serving my constituents and my  
11 veterans living in my district through the  
12 Department of Veteran Services or Veterans Affairs.  
13 I can't do that right now. I can't put that  
14 funding through MOVA because it's not its own  
15 agency; it doesn't have a baseline budget. And I  
16 have American Legion Posts in my district for the  
17 guys who are 70 and 80 years old and we're sending  
18 the emails for them and scanning documents because  
19 a lot of these guys are just not that computer  
20 savvy and they can't do what DYCD is asking them to  
21 do. If you actually had a Department of Veterans  
22 Affairs and we were doing it through them, I'm sure  
23 they'd find a way to accommodate those  
24 organizations and those groups, so that's a benefit  
25

1 of having it. But yes, we're going to raise the  
2 level of importance in this city and visibility;  
3 that it's not a branch of the Mayor's Office or  
4 something that is simply an extension of the  
5 Mayor's Office, but it should be its own standalone  
6 department or agency in the city that will  
7 coordinate activities, benefits and funding for  
8 everything related to veterans in the city I'm  
9 hoping. That's my hope.

11 With respect to the Veterans Advisory  
12 Board, I know it's not the focus of this hearing,  
13 but I've read and then will be in touch with all of  
14 you and some of the other folks who are here to  
15 testify in the coming months over the summer. We  
16 would... I am very interested in revamping it and  
17 taking a closer look at it and figuring out what  
18 are some of the growing pains that some of you have  
19 experienced in trying to make that better, perhaps  
20 more active and bringing it to the outer boroughs;  
21 you know, to the boroughs outside of Manhattan.  
22 Maybe instead of requiring four meetings, we  
23 require one of the ideas that we got some... one of  
24 the groups was requiring at least; you can have  
25 more, but at least five meetings a year, but

mandate that one be in each borough and that public notice be given. So doing it in each borough hall, for instance, where you can get the space for free and we can advertise it to all the VSOs and put it in the local papers so that a veteran who has an issue or wants to hear or get involved a veterans issue can go to Queens Borough Hall on such and such a date and attend the public meeting of the Veterans Advisory Board or in Staten island or Manhattan or the Bronx, so that is an idea that we might amend a Local Law to reflect. There's some other things too. I think that many of you have ideas that are worthwhile. We want to incorporate that, so before an LS request is put in; before the bill is drafted, we will be in contact with all of you.

And then finally, back to the topic of the conversation, then I'll see if Council Member Vallone has any questions. I would like... this is like a lightening round. If you had to scale the performance of MOVA of one to 10, 10 being outstanding; phenomenal performance; great job; no recommendation or improvement needed and one being the absolute worst; don't even bring it up again,

from one to 10 I'd like your honest assessment of MOVA's job performance over the previous fiscal years. John?

JOHN ROWAN: [off mic] Well, within their limitations, an eight.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Put the mic on, put the mic on.

COCO CULHANE: Sorry, within their limitations, a six.

JASON HANSMAN: Within their limitations, a five.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We're going down here.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: Within their limitations, a nine.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, so let me get this right: five, six, eight and nine, right? Was that what people said? Okay, alright. Alright, Council Member Vallone?

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair and we... yeah, somebody put the clock on, that's good.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Three minutes.



COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We all agree with our chair on this and I think... first of all, thank you for everything that you've done in the service and what you've done for us. Something came up with the Commissioner that I really didn't get too much of an answer on and maybe you could help me, especially Coco, with this Veteran Treatment Courts. Any experience with them and what's the status of them?

COCO CULHANE: So we... I mean our office only does civil legal work...

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Mm-hm.

[crosstalk]

COCO CULHANE: And we provide support to the courts basically, but I'm not sure what you're... if you have a more specific question about it.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well and they're not currently in all boroughs, correct?

COCO CULHANE: Right. My understanding is that there's been very strong resistance in Manhattan.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: 'Kay, alright,  
that...

COCO CULHANE: [interposing] Which has  
to do with the DA.

JOHN ROWAN: Yeah.

COCO CULHANE: It's the DA.

JOHN ROWAN: Yeah, we've had very...  
frankly, VVA in Buffalo is... a bunch of my guys up  
in Buffalo started this whole thing with the judge  
up there and it's now spread across the country and  
it's... and it's taking on a life of its own,  
thankfully. If we had that years ago, we could've  
saved a lot of Vietnam veterans. It's been working  
very well. The people going through it, by and  
large, do not become recidivists. Most of them  
complete the program, a vast, overwhelming  
majority. One of the key components is we supply  
mentors to assist them along, not unlike folks  
working with AAA and substance abuse where you have  
a sponsor and the Vietnam vets have taken on that  
as a mission and many of my members are  
participating in those programs and we would like  
to see them everywhere and we know they're working  
as well in Nassau County and Rockwood County in

Upstate New York and Monroe and Genesee and Erie and so and the entire state of California has adopted, as is the state of Wisconsin and it's... I just was at a convention last month out in LA and there were 500 people who work in Vet Courts all around the country participating in this conference. So it's a great program.

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, there seemed to be like a bit of a disconnect between identifying the veteran and getting them to the...

[crosstalk]

JOHN ROWAN: Well, the veterans, by the way... well, I had a long conversation with the DA's Office in Brooklyn about that and they... one of the things they did add in the intake form; anybody... anybody getting arrested at all is asked the question, "Did you serve in eh military?" So now the problem is they can hide that fact; why they'd want to do that I don't know, but some people do and that's a shame.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's just Brooklyn?

JOHN ROWAN: Well no, that's a standardized form there apparently, as I understand it for all intake and all criminal cases. Anybody arrested has a standardized state form now that's been modified to ask that magic question. This has been one of the things we started years ago when we first asked HRA... you know, we had to beat up HRA to ask anybody coming into the shelters did they serve in the military and they'd never ask that.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, that might be something we can again...

[crosstalk]

JOHN ROWAN: Codify.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: District Attorneys codify; the Bar Association. We'd like to help with that. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON ULICH: And it is worth mentioning, Council Member Eugene, my predecessor, as the chair of this committee, did introduce a bill two months ago. I don't have the Intro Number, but requiring that Vet Courts be established in each borough, so... or Reso rather, I'm sorry, so it is his bill and I've already spoken to him about it and we will explore that.

1 Why Cy Vance does not want to put a Vet Court in  
2 [chime] New York County is beyond me, but that's a  
3 question you'd have to ask him. There's no  
4 questions from Councilman Cohen, but that's  
5 something that maybe the papers should pursue more  
6 than me and I'm hoping that maybe *The New York*  
7 *Post*, in their diligent quest for uncovering  
8 injustices in this city, will pursue that, but Mr.  
9 Vance has his own problems. Anyway, I thank the  
10 panel for their testimony today and let's call up  
11 the next one. We have a lot of good people who  
12 want to testify here. Scott Thompson; Mario  
13 Figueroa; Avi Leshes from the Brooklyn Chamber of  
14 Commerce and Rob Piechova... Piechota, sorry. I  
15 apologize. The handwriting could be better.  
16 [laughter] He obviously didn't go to Catholic  
17 school. What can I tell you? [laughter] Or Yeshiva  
18 school, sorry, okay. [background voices] If you  
19 saw my handwriting, you'd think it was a woman's.  
20 That's how good it is. I went to Catholic  
21 elementary, high school and college. What can I  
22 tell you? Exactly. Bring back the nuns, right?  
23 No, I'm just kidding. Don't read today's *Post*, by  
24 the way; bad story about that. Okay, so we will  
25

have the Committee Counsel, Kelly Taylor, swear in the panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sure, can you raise your right hand, please? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before the committee and to respond honestly to all council member questions? Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright, why don't we start with Scott?

SCOTT THOMPSON: Chair Ulrich and members of the committee, thanks for your leadership, particularly recently, in addressing the needs of veterans and for organizing this hearing on the role of the Mayor's Office of Veteran Affairs. My name is Scott Thompson. I'm the Director of the Veterans Mental Health Coalition of New York City. I'm also a veteran and former Army Chaplain. The Coalition, which has over 1,000 diverse members, was co-founded by the Mental Health Association of New York City and NAMI-New York City Metro and it promotes the mental health and well-being of New York city service members, veterans and their families through

education, information, collaboration and promotion of a comprehensive array of services. The Veterans Mental Health Coalition has established a subcommittee on promoting needed policy reforms. It's called the Veterans Mental Health Action Committee and it's on whose behalf I am testifying today. Some of this is just redundant and my testimony will be very brief 'cause I've been really impressed with what's been spoken before and I knew those voices would be in the room today.

225,000 New York City residents are veterans. As more transition back to civilian life, especially with the drawdown, as folks had mentioned, this number is just going to continue to increase by the thousands and it's going to require additional resources in both dollars and staffing to fill this need. A range of coordinated services from all levels of government, the private sector and the local civilian-based providers is required for veterans and their families to successfully transition and thrive in their communities. In New York City, MOVA is the lead government body addressing veterans' needs, including advising the Mayor on issues, et cetera and while MOVA has a

critical leadership role in confronting the needs of the city's veterans, it has lacked the funding, resources and staffing to fully operationalize its mission.

In order for New York City to fully support and commit to addressing the needs of all veterans, it must do more and that is why the Veterans Mental Health Action Committee lends its full support to the recent proposed city legislation Council Member Ulrich just mentioned, Section 2, Chapter 75, being proposed that MOVA be elevated to the level of the New York City Department of... I think the semantics is good to get that straight. With a department dedicated to serving veterans, greater resources and funding can be secured to better overcome the complex challenges of veterans of all generations. Ideally, I think the Department should serve as a single stop model that would enable veterans to obtain necessary information and resources, including all of the services. There's no need to read this list. In addition to the funding, this will require a much more dedicated and certified staff that's able to perform these functions. My



statement is out of date. I appreciate Commissioner Holliday's updating me on this; that I thought while experienced, that the current staff at MOVA were not veteran... or certified veteran service officers. I know that that process is well along at this point, but even the Commissioner himself has yet to obtain his next step in that process.

Furthermore, New York City veteran government leadership, whether MOVA or a department, would do well to raise the profile of New York City military veterans. They say New York City is a vet-friendly town, but not so much in the government. We'd like to have the next leadership be able to really take veterans and their issues and raise that profile. This includes increasing awareness about their challenges and needs, as well as the strengths of veterans to the general public, fellow government partners and the private sector. When Robin Hood goes away, we still need to take from some organizations to support the needs of veterans here.

We believe this is an important time of transition for MOVA. With new leadership in all

branches of government, this is a new opportunity for New York City to step forward and make good on its commitments. Thank you for the opportunity to speak and to maximize and elevate this important office. Please reach out if you have questions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you very much. Next.

AVI LESHES: Good morning. My name is Avi Leshes and I work with the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce as a Project Manager for Economic Development. Just to reiterate some of the points that have been mentioned here, and one of the things that the Chamber would endorse is that MOVA currently does not have anything providing employment services. If you have a veteran coming back, you know, they have a great number of services; employment, housing, homelessness, education, health and burial and the VA home loan. We think it would be beneficial to extend their programs to provide job training, job placement, business development and resources, which the city offers to any other immigrant or any other

population, which the veterans would be incentivized to do that.

In addition to that, you know, currently the veteran hiring preferences, like other states, the city does not have. Additionally, New York City does not have affordable housing preferences or tax waivers for veterans that other states do have. We would also like to recommend that the Department of Homeless Services begin tracking veteran homelessness. We know that veteran homelessness is a big problem, but no one knows the actual numbers of it and I think that's something that the Department of Homeless Services should start tracking so we know how big the issue is.

And talking about coordination, I think that it's important that you know, given that for the chamber we recently launched the Veteran Council. The point of the Veteran Council is to bring together people from the for-profit and not-for-profit sector and to really take them out of the silos and to be working together on various initiatives. And some things we still believe is that we... there is an interest now; there is

1 momentum given you know, all the support that this  
2 Council has been doing and this particular  
3 committee has been doing for veterans. We think  
4 it's important to really take that momentum and  
5 then make sure that the government and the city  
6 does have the services that provide to make  
7 incentives for veterans; creating a procurement  
8 system for the city. The state now has that; the  
9 federal government has that. It would be important  
10 to see that on the city level, so that really  
11 expands veteran programs here in the city and make  
12 it more friendly for them.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

15 ROBERT PIECHOT: Alright, good morning  
16 or good afternoon. My name is Rob Piechota. I'm  
17 the Director of the Small Business Development  
18 Center in Brooklyn. Mr. Cohen, Mr. Vallone, Mr.  
19 Ulrich and Kelly, thanks for being here. People  
20 were saying I don't really care how much you know  
21 until I know how much you care. You all are here  
22 for these veterans and thank you to all for your  
23 service out there or if you love a veteran thank  
24 you.

MOVA, it's... you asked a poll before;  
a lightning round what people's thoughts about  
performance have been and the main...

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: How 'bout I do the  
same for this panel?

ROBERT PIECHOTA: Oh, I'm so glad I  
reminded you. Thank you. The mission statement,  
as I took off the website of MOVA, is it advises  
the Mayor on issues and initiatives that impact the  
veteran and military community. MOVA works with  
the US Department of Vets... anyway, it goes on and  
on and it's... one challenge clearly they've had  
it's very, very broad scope. If there's an  
opportunity for growth with any MOVA that comes  
after funding; that is to really narrow the scope,  
broaden and deepen the level of service, hire  
talent, get people in place that aren't metric  
driven and like you all are asking you know, how  
much money would it take; what would be the  
outcome? That's clearly a major opportunity for  
growth for anybody who takes over the reins of  
MOVA. Without question it deserves its own  
different department.

It's a sort of a... it has been for us. We do a number of forums for veterans who are trying to get into business for themselves and quite often, they turn into job fairs because quite often, small business owners really are not prepared to get their businesses larger or even to get into business. So quite often, we refer to various agencies; people in the audience that have spoken before. So it's all about cross referencing and referring to each other and that's what I think has been the great success of the current Commissioner and MOVA in general as far as finding the right agency for the right person in need, whether it be by phone call or by email and just networking in general, but based on the level of occupants or the number of people they have has been very challenging for them and I'm sure some people do, in fact, fall through the cracks, but the intention is there and it's hard to be all things to all people as some folks have mentioned before.

With all the altruistic, patriotic and ethical reasons aside for continuing this office and even expanding this operation, it just makes

sense. Using an economic model predicting return on investment for preventive dollars spent, it is in New York City's best fiscal interest in getting veterans the help they need in the shortest amount of time possible. Even the most modest studies show that for every dollar on prevention, there is a potential \$100 savings in the alternative. MOVA has the potential to assist as one of the most heroic and noble veteran salvation operations in all of America. By continuing to direct veterans to veteran groups with speed and efficiencies, there is a positive economic outcome to the City of New York, a higher moral need served and a national need met in a way that only the City of New York can provide. I sense a level of motivation in all of your voices when you talk about this program in this city. [chime] There's no reason why New York City cannot lead in this area. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Mario?

MARIO FIGUEROA: Chairman, committee members, my name is Mario Figueroa. I'm a Marine Corps combat veteran, former board member of the US Military Veterans of Columbia University and

currently, the Director for Veterans Services for the United War Veterans Council.

I'm presenting this testimony as a veteran, a student, a New Yorker and as I said, the Director for Veteran Services. In all four capacities, I'm concerned for the lack of decisive action from the New York State and City governments. However, the community is very grateful that several New York City council members, this committee included, have been very vocal and supportive of many programs and policy changes that, if budgeted and implemented, will be very helpful to the veteran community.

My concern is most easily highlighted by two articles. One was a *Crain's New York* article from April 2013 for "Returning Vets, a New Battle Looms," in which they conservatively estimate that over the next five years, 44,000 veterans will be returning to New York. That is in addition to the 200,000 plus that are already here in the city and that number only includes the veterans that are registered with the VA.

The second article comes from *The Gotham Gazette*, which was recently published May



2014, "Veterans Benefit Counselors at Risk in Budget," which we've all touched on. The money from Robin Hood is going away; the city still hasn't found a way to find it in their budget to replace that money. The idea when this program was first allocated was that the city would find a way after one year to be able to fund these three VSOs on its own. That hasn't happened yet and it doesn't look like it's going to happen.

So what does that mean for MOVA and more importantly, what does that mean for New York City? It means that we, as a city, will be woefully unprepared for the deluge of veterans in this city that have needs that run the gamut of, "Can I have some information on the GI Bill so I can go to school, get a job and be a positive economic factor in this city?" To, "If I don't get help today, I may hurt myself or someone else."

As it stands, MOVA and New York City are ill-equipped to fight this battle. It is critical now more than ever that MOVA be given the funding that it needs to effect real change. This community fought for MOVA to be listed and recognized as a Mayoral level department of the

city with a Commissioner and not a Director as its chief. The salary of the head of MOVA is not the problem. The problem is that the city is not allocating enough money to appoint someone qualified and allow MOVA to do the full breadth of its job.

As I sit before you, the state has asked the United War Veterans Council, a non-profit, to consult on and fund their new program aimed at attacking the VA backlog in the state. To raise this money, nearly \$3 million, we need cooperation from the city, which unfortunately, has been too slow to come by. So I ask you, how can the veterans community count on New York when it cannot find room in its budget to fund this program or at the very least, do everything it can to help private organizations that have stepped up to continue the fight? How can we have faith in a city that cannot find room in its budget to keep three VSOs on the payroll? And how can MOVA properly address these issues and more without the funding [chime] that it deserves and badly needs? MOVA is certainly not perfect, but no city agency is; however, with what this city is facing with its

current and future veteran population, we are sending MOVA into battle with no ammunition by not giving it the funding that it requires and that our service men and women deserve. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Mario. Well said and my... I'm not partial to any branch in the military, but my brother just enlisted with the Marines, so he's going to San Diego 'cause he lives on the other side of the Mississippi River. Anyway, he's going in a few months. Let's do the lightning round question and then see if my colleagues have... if you had to rate the job performance of MOVA on a scale of one to 10, one being the least favorable, 10 being phenomenal; no improvement; you know, just doing the best job. Given the resources, fair to say... I'm not... it's not a baited question; it's just given what they have, if you had to rate the job they're doing now one to 10, what would you give it? You have to say it on the record. Sign language is not accepted here, so. [laughter] And if it's one, make sure you're using your index finger, not... [laughter]

SCOTT THOMPSON: I'd give it a four. I think it's... again, I think the funding thing is

important, but its actions have been largely symbolic.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Four. Next?

AVI LESHES: Six.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Six.

ROBERT PIECHOTA: As it applies to our office, seven.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Seven.

MARIO FIGUEROA: Eight.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Eight, okay. Do my colleagues have any questions? Next panel. Thank you. And then we have one final panel after this, but we have Pat... [background voice] Gualtieri, I should know that, okay, Gualtieri from United War Vets Council; Paul... now we're getting German names here. Hold on... Schottenhamel, right? That's from Queens County American Legion in Ridgewood; Lee Covino, United War Vets and Joe... Gralan, Graham?

JOSEPH GRAHAM: [off mic] Joe Graham, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Graham, okay, sorry. Alright, sorry about that, alright. I apologize. Alright, so take your seat at the dais.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And when you are seated, the Committee Counsel will swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: 'Kay, can you please raise your right hands? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before the committee today and to respond honestly to council member questions? Thank you.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright, why do we start here on the left? State your name for the record and begin your testimony when you have a chance.

PATRICK GUALTIERI: I'm on? Good. Hi, my name is Pat Gualtieri. I'm the Executive Director of the United War Veterans Council and I'm here literally to tell you that I'm down the hallway from MOVA for the last 14 years, so it's a good bird's eye view.

What I wanted to come and say is pretty much following on what many of you said. We're located in the same quarter, so we obviously see the Mayor's Office of Veteran Affairs and all their

1 employees and their activities every day. We  
2 actually see quite a bit of morale, quite a bit of  
3 high morale. We see the Commissioner coming in and  
4 I must tell you, being there 14 years, I could tell  
5 you prior to Commissioner Holliday walking in, I  
6 didn't see a Commissioner walk into our office,  
7 even to say good morning, let alone how's it going;  
8 can I help? Understand that; that's a big deal.

10 Secondly, they share in lots of things  
11 that we need because we do the Veterans Day Parade;  
12 we do Memorial Day Parade; we're helping our  
13 veterans every day. We need information. Well,  
14 you got a Commissioner there that was formally a  
15 Colonel in the Air Force and he comes with that  
16 loaded and he can direct you and he can tell you  
17 this is the way I think you should go; this is the  
18 way I think you should be back and forth; lots of  
19 great direction; presence. This is interesting.  
20 As the Chairman of this, he would be asked to speak  
21 hypothetically. Imagine this fellow, he's asked to  
22 speak, along with his staff, at many events and  
23 they're big time and he's standing over there and  
24 he's got his presence and he's got his bearing and  
25 what he does is he actually brings a lot of I feel

1 integrity to the Office of the Mayor. So when he's  
2 there representing the Mayor, he actually is and  
3 people love that. They love to know that if the  
4 Mayor's not going to be there, there's somebody  
5 that cares, so it seems. And in the veterans'  
6 community, taking this area, boy, what a Road's  
7 Gallery this is and some of these people here would  
8 know you're being bullshitted and they know they're  
9 not, so that's very important.

11 It's a whole list of activities that  
12 they do; clothing drives. We've seen their  
13 hallways filled with veterans getting clothes. It  
14 was amazing over there and the Commissioner and his  
15 staff fitting people and giving stuff; job fairs  
16 were held; veterans' benefits and the list went on.

17 As I close this, it is now what, July  
18 1st. How does the Commissioner not even know he's  
19 on post tomorrow? This is a big issue; I really  
20 feel this. So I think he should know, he should be  
21 told and also I feel that the veterans' community  
22 should know what's in store. That's what I got.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's June 23rd.

24 PATRICK GUALTIERI: June 23rd, alright.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You're a week off,  
but that's alright.

PATRICK GUALTIERI: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And you do get  
credit for showing up. I've had a job fair myself  
on May 25th in my district for veterans and he did  
show up, as he does many times.

PATRICK GUALTIERI: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I'm sure that  
many people appreciate the fact that he shows up.

PATRICK GUALTIERI: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Why don't we begin  
the next testimony and we'll start the clock?

LEE COVINO: Thank you. My name's Lee  
Covino and I'm also the Vice Chairman of the  
Veterans Advisory Board, but I'm testifying under a  
Staten Island organization today. Honorable  
Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee on  
Veterans, we appreciate this opportunity to  
feedback on the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs.  
My name is Lee Covino and I am a Board Officer of  
the United Staten Island Veterans Organization, an  
umbrella organization comprised of representatives  
from the veterans' organizations operating on



VSOs are a necessary part of filing a successful VA claim because of the technical nature

of proving medical disabilities. The New York State Division of Vets Affairs has only one VSO on Staten Island and only a handful in the other boroughs, and service officers working for traditional veterans' organizations are aging out and not being replaced in many instances. At the same time, thousands of recently discharged veterans are expected to return to the five boroughs as the military drawdown reaches its peak in the coming year.

Successful claims bring federal dollars to the city's economy. The state knows full well the value of bringing these federal dollars in VA services into our economy and they have employed VSOs both upstate and downstate for many decades. It is now time that our city pitches in to assist in the already overwhelming caseload. Without the VSOs, many veterans would wind on city benefits and services.

With Memorial Day in our rearview mirror, it's time to follow the VFW's motto, which is, "Honor the dead by helping with the living." We must do more than just march in parades. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well said.  
Commander?

PAUL SCHOTTENHAMEL: Yeah, I'm Paul Schottenhamel. I'm the Adjutant for Queens County American Legion. I'm a retire Lieutenant Colonel for 29 years in the service in the Army; active Army, National Guard and Army Reserve. I'm a combat veteran in Vietnam and was wounded in action and the Purple Heart and the VA declared me 40 percent disabled.

I would like to address the disposition of unclaimed veterans, the funding for the Veterans Benefits Counselors, the size of our budget and the endorsement of Commissioner Holliday. As far as the unclaimed veterans, for the last... since 2009, one of my duties has been to handle the burial of unclaimed veterans. It's handled through the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and we've done approximately 30 of those burials. I took the lead from the Vietnam Veteran's Chapter 32, of which I'm also a lifetime member and I got the American Legion involved in that. And back in... since before Commissioner Holliday arrived, we had a lot of problems with processing these individuals to

1  
2 get them buried and since his arrival, we've been  
3 able to streamline that and avoid a lot of the  
4 administrative problems that we have had in the  
5 past. And the Commissioner or one of his  
6 representatives attends virtually every one of the  
7 funerals that we've conducted since he's been on  
8 board.

9 We recommend the City Council pass a  
10 bill that changes policy in the law that should  
11 include that they should make every attempt to  
12 identify the veterans and to make sure that they  
13 and their spouses receive proper burial in a  
14 national cemetery. A lot of veterans,  
15 unfortunately, wind up in Potter's Field because  
16 they're not properly identified.

17 As far as the funding for veterans, the  
18 Veteran Council, it's important. The VA recommends  
19 that all claims be placed through VA certified  
20 counselors. Having these counselors available at  
21 MOVA is extremely important and if the City Council  
22 does not fund these counselors, we would wind up  
23 losing a valuable asset and we already had spent a  
24 lot of time and money on the train-up and that's  
25 usually the biggest loss on having these

1 individuals. Once they're trained up, they begin  
2 to produce.

3  
4 The size of the MOVA budget, we [chime]  
5 think it's no sense having MOVA duplicate services  
6 that are provided by other city agencies. We  
7 should be identifying the veterans and make sure  
8 they get the proper priorities, as per law. The  
9 services are unique to the veteran community. We  
10 recommend that MOVA be expanded to a department  
11 with its own budget line and all personnel should  
12 be paid from that budget rather than on loan to  
13 that department and additional Veterans Benefit  
14 Counselors could be added to meet the workload,  
15 hopefully expanding to other boroughs. And we hope  
16 that the Mayor and the Council will confirm  
17 Commissioner Holliday in his present position.  
18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Sir?

20 JOSEPH GRAHAM: Okay, my name is Joe  
21 Graham. I'm President of the Manhattan Chapter of  
22 Vietnam Veterans of America; VVA, Chapter 126. I  
23 guess I'm the last guy on the line here and much of  
24 what I have to say has been said in one way, shape,  
25 form or another. I kind of feel like Elizabeth

Taylor's fifth husband on her wedding night, trying to come up with something new and unique to say or do, but let me go with this.

MOVA was established in 1987 with the passage of Local Law 53. The primary mission of MOVA is to ensure that New York City resident veterans and their families receive the services promised to them as a result of their military service. The current veteran population in New York City is approximately 200,000, with an estimated 45,000 more veterans returning to New York in the next five years, as reported by *Crain's New York* newspaper on 4-21-2013 issue. The need for the services and support that MOVA offers our veteran community is growing. I urge the City Council to take into consideration the increasing needs of our veterans community, as our young men and women come home from multiple deployments to hostile countries. Large numbers of these young men and women are returning to our city broken and suffering from extreme cases of PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injuries, not to mention severe physical injuries and wounds.

MOVA's ability to mentor these veterans is critical. With the leadership of Commissioner Terry Holliday, our city is fortunate to have a proven professional. Commissioner Holliday's many years in the military give him unique insight into the organizational workings of a government military organization. Commissioner Holliday's dedication is readily apparent. His always jovial, good cheer and sincere interest in veterans is conveyed to all. He is respected by our veterans' community from the enlisted man to the four-star Generals that he meets with regularly.

Under Commissioner Holliday's direction, the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs has helped veterans in the following ways:

Operation Stand Down helps homeless veterans to find housing and shelter, such as the Borden Avenue Homeless Shelter in Queens; career job fairs, held annually at MOVA's offices, to help veterans find employment. Veteran service office programs helps veterans to register with the Veterans Administration for medical and education benefits. Burial services: MOVA works to identify deceased homeless veterans and ensures that they receive

proper burial in military cemeteries. [chime] This is only a partial list of services provided by MOVA for the veterans of New York City.

In closing, I strongly urge Terry Holliday's continuation as Commissioner of Veterans Affairs for New York City. I also urge the New York City Council and Mayor de Blasio to increase funding for this much needed office. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, as I did in the previous two panels, I'm going to ask you on a scale from one to 10, rate the job performance of MOVA, the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. Just start on the left; one being the least great and 10 being, of course, outstanding performance.

PATRICK GUALTIERI: Nine.

LEE COVINO: I'm going to compare it to previous incarnations of MOVA, which go back to what John said. I was in MOVA in the '70's in Brooklyn, the Koch Era MOVA and I've experienced the other MOVAs and in comparison to these other incarnations, I give the current one a 10.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Commander?

PAUL SCHOTTENHAMEL: A 10.

JOSEPH GRAHAM: 10.



CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, it's like "Dancing with the Stars." [laughter] Alright, any questions from Council Vallone? Seeing there is none... by the way a little advertisement: we passed a resolution under this committee on May 29th calling on Albany to pass the Military Buy-Back bill sponsored by State Senator Bill Larkin and Assembly Member Amy Paulin, respectively. We received news that before the legislature wrapped up their session in Albany, they did pass that and we are expecting Governor Cuomo to sign it, so I believe that we did our part to advance that bill in Albany and I'm very proud and thankful for the support that each of you and your organization have given that because that is going to make a difference in a lot of lives of veterans and their ability [applause] to support their families, so. There are no questions, so we'll move onto the final panel. Thank you for your testimony. We have two panels, sorry. Let's start with Ed Scholeman; Major Jacqueline Torres from the Bronx; Reverend Robert Farley, and then we'll do another three after this.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, before we start, I'll ask the Committee Counsel to administer the oath.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sure, can you please raise your right hands? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before the committee today and to respond honestly to council member questions? Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright, why don't we begin, Mr. Schloeman?

ED SCHLOEMAN: Thank you very much for the opportunity to present my product to you. not like Commissioner Holliday, if you offer me money, I will take it and the reason for that is that I have a product that is working. It's been around for 5,000 years. It helps people, especially combat veterans to overcome the horrors of war. My name is Ed Schloeman and I'm Chairman of Operation Warrior Wellness, a division of the David Lynch Foundation. I'm a Marine disabled veteran who served 28 years in uniform, most of it with the New York National Guard. There isn't day in Vietnam that I didn't think of Brooklyn and there hasn't

I have been four years now speaking to every organization in America, including the 82nd Airborne; the 101st Airborne; the Marine Corps in Camp Pendleton; the USO; the IAVA; the Wounded Warrior Project; the Robin Hood Foundation. I could continue this for the next 15 minutes. Not one has said no to my product and I don't expect the City of New York to say no. I do expect the City of New York to be the first in the nation to embrace meditation as a warrior's code just as Russell Simmons has brought it into the inner-school system with a donation of \$2 million. Imagine in the inner-school system teaching meditation. For what reason? It improves the ability to learn, it improves absenteeism and it keeps the children from fighting and bullying with one another.

I urge you to accept my challenge of asking you to be the very first and above all, I do believe that Mayor de Blasio, who does know me, would relate to Post-Traumatic Stress since his father took his own life after World War II. So we all suffer in our own ways with the demons of war and stress is the Black Plague of the 21st Century and New York is rated as the number one stress factor, the stress part of the country. Imagine bringing home veterans to cope now; to live in the number one stress part of our country, New York City. Thank you for letting me speak today and I will be waiting for any questions, which I hope you have a few.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Jacqueline?

JACQUELINE TORRES: Good morning, my name is Jacqueline Torres. I'm a retired Major from the US Army and I served 16 and a half years active duty and about three and a half in the National Guard. I was medically discharged due to a back injury I had in Airborne School about 10 years ago.

Please excuse my attire. I had not intended on speaking today; however, I was moved to

1 speak with what I was hearing. I actually retired  
2 last year and actually did testify before this  
3 panel because I was having difficulty finding a  
4 job. It was that journey of trying to find a job  
5 where I actually applied for over 100 jobs and  
6 didn't even receive call backs. It wasn't like I  
7 went to the interview and failed the interview. I  
8 wasn't even calls back and I was a Major in the  
9 Army, responsible for over 3,500 soldiers dispersed  
10 between Iraq, all over the US in three different  
11 time zones and I had experience and good reports  
12 and no reason to not be able to find a job. It  
13 just speaks for the economy and unfortunately, if  
14 I'm having that problem as a Major, I just imagine  
15 that many other service members are as well.

17 It's that journey that I went through  
18 that actually has caused me to get more involved in  
19 veterans issues and why I'm here... that's why I'm  
20 here today. What I witnessed today, unfortunately,  
21 with the testimony of Commissioner Holliday,  
22 unfortunately... I don't mean to offend him  
23 personally, but what I saw was a lack of  
24 leadership. I did not see a proposed budget for  
25 future or current plans where we should be moving

1 for the MOVA to take and solve problems for future  
2 issues and even current issues. I saw someone  
3 happy with the status quo and I know that just  
4 having retired from the military, that's not  
5 something that would have gotten passed if we  
6 would've been at a quarterly training briefing in  
7 the Army, let's say, so I don't think it should  
8 pass here.  
9

10 I actually have experience with MOVA.  
11 The only experience I have is that I went on the  
12 website and I actually wrote a letter to Mr.  
13 Holliday; I'm not sure he gets it exactly, but  
14 someone in his staff does I'm sure, where I  
15 actually wanted to volunteer to... on issues and I  
16 have yet to receive a call back.

17 A few of the notes I wanted to comment  
18 on was regarding these liaisons. I actually  
19 attended a Bronx Borough President Veteran Advisory  
20 Council where we had a HRA liaison [chime] and she  
21 actually briefed us; spoke to us about her program  
22 and unfortunately, she really didn't have much  
23 knowledge at all. It was more us informing her of  
24 what the issues and potentially trying to set up  
25 training, which I have to admit, it is a good place

1  
2 to start, but it just goes to show that these  
3 liaisons are not knowledgeable of military or  
4 veteran issues either.

5 And in terms of... Councilman Vallone,  
6 in terms of your question regarding the Bronx  
7 Veterans Court, I'm actually a veteran mentor and  
8 it is a very good program that veterans are getting  
9 a lot of help over. From my knowledge, what  
10 happens is once a veteran is identified, that case  
11 gets routed through to Bronx Veterans Court, which  
12 is presided over by a particular judge and his name  
13 escapes me right now, but it is conducted once a  
14 month. And the reason it's been successful in the  
15 Bronx is because Judge McKeon himself was a veteran  
16 and so he was open to the idea of doing it in the  
17 Bronx as well.

18 Another question that came up was in  
19 terms of how do we identify these veterans and I  
20 think a good idea would be to change the law in  
21 terms of the arrest questionnaire. I know that's  
22 something that I spoke to Assemblyman Benedetto  
23 about regarding the voter registration where we add  
24 a box check that says, "Have you served n the  
25 military?" And that's something that could be done

1 in the police questionnaire when someone's  
2 arrested, so I don't know if that would require a  
3 bill as well, but I think that's the way to  
4 identify them.  
5

6 In terms of the ID card, I think it  
7 should be driver's license or you know, just on the  
8 driver's license there should be a symbol where you  
9 just answer the question, "Are you a veteran; are  
10 you..." Actually, not "Are you a veteran?"  
11 Because a lot of the veterans aren't identifying  
12 themselves as veterans. You have to ask, "Did you  
13 ever serve in the Armed Services?"

14 Lastly, I just want to say that I feel  
15 like communities heal and improve from within and I  
16 would like to see MOVA have more of a part in the  
17 outer boroughs, as opposed to working with VSOs  
18 that the majority are located in Manhattan, as  
19 opposed to doing things more in the Bronx. I know  
20 there isn't a whole lot going on in the Bronx with  
21 MOVA.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay.

23 JACQUELINE TORRES: Thank you for your  
24 time today.  
25



CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your testimony. Reverend, you're the final member of the panel to speak.

REVEREND FARLEY: Grace and peace. Good morning, Council. My name is Reverend Robert B. Farley, PhD in Psychology. I am a Vietnam combat vet, disabled and I have a son who is actively in the Marine Corps now and he's been there 10 years. I have a daughter and a son-in-law who are on active duty now and my granddaughter just enrolled in the US Academy in Colorado.

Veterans are Still Warriors, Veterans Serving Veterans are located in the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. We see approximately 25 vets per day. My office opens up at 5:00 in the morning. I am the only individual from any veterans' service organization in New York State that I see in any court in the five boroughs Housing Courts; Civil Courts; Family Courts, Criminal Courts. How do we change the system? The system has to identify veterans from the onset. If you look at HRA forms, HRA forms has a questionnaire on that that asks, "Are you a veteran?" If we can identify who the veterans are

1 when they report to HRA, we can then send them to  
2 the VA and also to Social Security, saving the city  
3 millions and millions of dollars. What does MOVA  
4 need? MOVA needs metro cards, postage stamps,  
5 lunch tickets. Those are the things that come out  
6 of my organizational pockets every day. For every  
7 veteran that comes into my office we wind up doing  
8 at least \$15 in mailing. That's out of pocket. We  
9 are a 501(c)3. We're a young organization. We  
10 receive no funding whatsoever. MOVA is where our  
11 offices are, so that's saving us money, but we're  
12 the only organization that I bump into at HRA, at  
13 Social Security and again, in court.

14 And if you look at page one of  
15 Commissioner Holliday's report it says  
16 approximately 210,000 veterans. Those are veterans  
17 that are in the system. Those are veterans that  
18 are not been counted. A veteran that does not  
19 receive an honorable discharge does not fall under  
20 that number. The number actually from the  
21 Department of Defense for New York State is one  
22 million veterans. Over half of those are not  
23 recognized. There are actually as of last month,  
24 36,000 females within New York State. 12,000 of  
25

those do not have honorable discharges and that's the key.

To answer a question that was asked earlier, we're in the process of [chime] putting together a forum asking attorneys to at least give us eight hours a month just to assist with briefs, preparing and representing clients in Civil Court. We have a lot of cases with unemployment. We have a lot of cases of veterans suing the corporation and we would welcome you into our office.

We receive no funding. I cannot go to Commissioner Holliday and ask him for a postage stamp; "Could you comingle our mail with yours so our mail can be mailed?" If I have a homeless vet and I'm trying to upgrade him and if I'm trying to get him benefits or service, am I supposed to ask him for a postage stamp? How do I get him from Queens to my office? How do I get him back home? When I come in my office at 5:00, there's usually already five vets waiting downstairs in the lobby and with the construction and the sale of the building, my office now is 12x18. So my next move I would assume would be to jail somewhere where I can help veterans that are already incarcerated.

I thank this committee. What would I give MOVA? First of all, I would give them a five for allowing a non-profit organization...

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I didn't ask yet.

REVEREND FARLEY: Oh, okay.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'm getting there, but now that you started we will... we'll start with you. So you give them a five?

REVEREND FARLEY: I give them a five for the space and a five for the spirit and attitude of helping veterans that are there. They are very passionate about what they do. Again, they will open the door. We worked for a year out of the back of my vehicle and basically we still work out of the back of my vehicle. You can find me any morning at Housing Court within the five boroughs. We have a rotating schedule and it's just work trying to get attorneys to help us. as Judge Klein says, "Doc, when you're in my courthouse it seems that things run smoother." We're there to protect those who protected us. We're there to fight for those who can no longer fight. This country was built on the back and the

1 blood and the sweat and the tears of our soldiers  
2 and it's sad that when a can of soda is worth more  
3 than a veteran. You get five cents back when you  
4 turn in a can. What do you get when you turn in a  
5 veteran? Thank you.

6  
7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Jackie, a number?

8 JACQUELINE TORRES: Unlike some of the  
9 previous panelists where they're comparing them  
10 with previous MOVA's, I would like to compare them  
11 to what I would expect; what I would like to see in  
12 the future and I would probably give them a six.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Mr. Schloeman?

14 ED SCHLOEMAN: The Commissioner gave me  
15 my first opportunity to speak to First Responders  
16 about 18 months ago and based upon that, 25 First  
17 Responders entered my program, of which they still  
18 practice meditation. Many of them came from 9/11,  
19 so I have to thank the Commissioner and I give him  
20 an eight and I look forward to working with him in  
21 the future and we need to be more aggressive.  
22 That's my bottom line though. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And Council Member  
24 Vallone has one quick follow-up before we dismiss  
25 the panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Major Torres, thank you for being inspired to speak. I was looking for more information on the Veterans Court, so maybe we can follow up and I know you're working in the Bronx.

JACQUELINE TORRES: Yes, sir.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Are you familiar with any other services in any other counties?

JACQUELINE TORRES: Not really, sir, unfortunately.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think that's something I would like to work with the Chair on, to make sure that we can expand that work with the Bar Associations; work with OCA; work with the groups that can provide those legal services and get that moving.

JACQUELINE TORRES: Definitely. It's definitely something I can help you with.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good stuff. Last panel: Paul Schubert, Rockaway Tiger; I saw him here; Lionelle Hamanaka and Ed Daniels. This is the final panel for today.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'll ask the  
Counsel to administer the oath.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can you all please  
raise your right hand? [background voice] Hm?  
Yeah, just raise your hand. Do you affirm to tell  
the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the  
truth in your testimony before the committee today  
and respond honestly to council member questions?  
'Kay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, let's start  
with Lionelle.

[Pause]

LIONELLE HAMANAKA: I do.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Ladies first.  
That's why...

[crosstalk]

LIONELLE HAMANAKA: Oh, okay.

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We went out of  
order.

LIONELLE HAMANAKA: My name is Lionelle  
Hamanaka. I'm a member of Military Families Speak  
Out, which is a group of families across the

country related to soldiers who have served since 9/11. We're opposed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Over the past 11 years, I've counseled voluntarily many military families and some veterans and I've seen some success. They have devised their own means without any funding, although they do get contributions. In different places around the country, they have set up veteran coffee shops.

So I think that I will speak about MOVA. I think that MOVA and the Veterans Administration in general are overlooking the biggest asset that they could utilize, which is the veterans themselves. I noticed today that veterans from prior wars are here, but I don't see the present generation represented; maybe a couple of people. Oh, hi. Anyway, in these coffee shops people meet weekly and discuss their problems. They have what they rap sessions, which they also had after the Vietnam War, and I think that the city could provide a place and link up with some social service agencies within the city, like Mayor Bloomberg appointed somebody in all city agencies



1 to be a liaison. I don't think it would be that  
2 expensive to have one place in each borough for  
3 veterans to go and have a weekly meeting if they  
4 wanted to talk about their problems. They've  
5 already set it up within the City University  
6 themselves. They had a committee at Brooklyn  
7 College where they had like 50 veterans from Iraq  
8 and Afghanistan and they set up little clubs on the  
9 campuses, so to a certain extent they've done that,  
10 but there should be a relationship between MOVA,  
11 the Veterans Administration and these groups. In  
12 some cases, the groups already exist.

14 I like Terrance Holliday. I called him  
15 up a few years ago and told him about a guy named  
16 Gary... whose name is Gary Washington, who was on  
17 the street. I saw him on 57th Street and I said,  
18 "This guy is homeless; he's a veteran from Vietnam;  
19 he sleeps behind a monument in Central Park." He  
20 said, "Well..." I didn't know his name at that  
21 time. "Well, give me his name and where he is and  
22 I'll come there and I'll talk to him." And he was  
23 willing to extend himself personally and I know he  
24 like always did meet the troops when they come back  
25 and so forth and so on. Compared to what was

1 before, MOVA has done a lot of work and he's a very  
2 positive spirited person. If you're going to  
3 establish a department I think that's great.  
4 Provide him with an expert on budget or whatever if  
5 they're not... they don't have those resources now  
6 and you know, whatever administrative help is  
7 necessary, because I found in calling up the  
8 Department of Homeless Services... I found Gary  
9 Washington again on 96th Street and Broadway and he  
10 was still homeless and this time he had an open  
11 sore on his leg. I had to make like three separate  
12 phone calls on three different occasions. I called  
13 9-1-1, 3-1-1, Department of Homeless Services, the  
14 local community center and you know, like really  
15 follow up to see whether or not he would like get  
16 taken off the street and put in a veterans'  
17 shelter, which is what he wanted.

18  
19 So I would say as a mother, you're  
20 spending right now let's say \$2.00 on each veteran  
21 in New York City. That's enough to buy a cup of  
22 coffee. So you go and send a veteran to war and  
23 spend \$1 million per soldier a year and then when  
24 he comes back, you're going to give him enough  
25 money for a [chime] cup of coffee. I really think

EDWARD DANIELS: Okay, thank you. Good afternoon to everyone and it's a privilege to be here. Generally, I come to these hearings; I don't usually speak, but like Major Torres said, some things transpired earlier in some earlier testimony that I felt it was important that I make my contribution to this hearing so that it would be on record and what my perception of some of the things that I've seen in my years in the veterans community, I know a lot of the people that spoke

earlier for long years. Some of them I was under their wing when I first came home, like the President of the VVA. You know, when I first came home out of the military, they took me around and they educated me and I've been working in the area of veterans affairs since then.

Regarding the hearing here today and the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, it's true that for the last several years, the last administration said... prior... some of the prior administrations and the veterans of the MOVA was put down a not only third rung, but a second rung from the bottom when it came to visibility here in the city and I have to agree. I'll just digress for a second because some of the people that just spoke, Jason from IAVA and Major Torres on some of the things regarding MOVA and what MOVA really needs. Major Torres talked about leadership and I was just speaking to someone out there outside before she spoke and I was saying the same thing; that if you're going to have... MOVA has to have a Commissioner that has vision, is able to lead and able to do what the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs was created for, to be the conduit between

the Mayor's Office, the government and the veterans community. The Mayor's... the person in charge of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, from my understanding, and I do have a copy of the Local Law, but unfortunately, I didn't bring it with me, and John can either support it or clarify it if I'm wrong, but what's supposed to happen is the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs is supposed to get the information from the community veterans; from the veterans service organizations, as well as individual veterans as to what the issues and problems they are having in re-assimilating back into the mainstream and then conversing with the Mayor and his administration to resolve those problems for us. Unfortunately, it hasn't happened. It's nice to be running around and do the hyperbole and do the ceremonial stuff, but when we talk about the hard-edged stuff, that's not being achieved. The Major talked about how many times she went to job fairs. I went to job fairs, but I'm not looking for a job. I went there to investigate and to ascertain whether or not it's effective [chime] and you put in an application and like she said, she put in an application; you never

1 hear anything and sometimes they would be friendly  
2 enough with you and say to you, "Well, we don't  
3 really have that right now, but we'll take your  
4 application," and so it was more or less... to me,  
5 it was a farce. I can talk about how many had went  
6 to the hotel on the corner of 8th Avenue and 33rd.  
7 I can talk about the ones that ones that went to  
8 Jacob Javits Center. I can talk about a whole  
9 bunch of them that I went to and I still have the  
10 same results. The only thing they were interested  
11 in getting were getting their numbers and when  
12 you're the... if you're the Mayor's Office of  
13 Veterans Affairs, you have to just make a concrete  
14 decision; do I continue to waste the time and the  
15 resources dealing with people with phantom  
16 organizations and phantom things because all it  
17 does is depress my constituents.

18  
19 Now, if you're going to support the  
20 Mayor's Office and you want to increase it, I think  
21 fine, it's a department and you can expand it, but  
22 you have to have someone there that has some  
23 leadership capability, to have some visions and  
24 have some direction and have a staff that can work  
25 and that know how to work with their own comrades.

1 You have people in some of these... in the Mayor's  
2 Office that are downright rude and if you tell them  
3 something because it doesn't happen for them on the  
4 first time, they get arrogant with you and so then  
5 you disengage because [chime] it's not just on an  
6 argument, but it's to get something done. The  
7 Department... if you want to call it the  
8 Department... the Department of Veterans Services  
9 for the City New York, that's fine. I mean I  
10 encourage it. I think this... I do know that the  
11 funding is short and they do need an increase in  
12 funding. They also need an increase in staffing  
13 and they need... that staffing needs to be trained.  
14 They should have more outreach to the community, to  
15 the veterans organizations and don't think that  
16 every veteran has a computer. They all don't have  
17 computers. The majority of the people here in New  
18 York City that are veterans come out of my  
19 generation of Vietnam. That's who the... most of  
20 these guys are. They don't all have computers.  
21 Most of them bare... most of them just retired and  
22 most of them are living from hand to foot trying to  
23 survive. You... if you can't send it to them  
24 directly, send it to their organization. You could

The other thing I wanted to say before I eat up more time is Mr. Vallone raised the issue about incarceration and the organization I represent deals with incarceration. We have been doing this since I think it was 1990, John, 1988? [background voice] Yeah, we started a long while ago and the... I got to [chime] say that the DA in Manhattan has been totally resistant to the idea of that and when you go into the jails and the prisons, no, they do not ask. I'll give you an example. I have a client that came from Arkansas that I'm dealing with right now. He got arrested. He had some mental health issues and he lost his car; he's been incarcerated. I spoke to ADA and I got... and I spoke to the Defense Counsel. The Defense Counsel said to me what I thought was incredulous. She said, "I didn't know he was a veteran." Hello? You spoke to this guy; you're representing him in a case now where they're



1 talking about incarcerating him and sending him  
2 upstate for alleged assault and you don't know that  
3 this is a Navy veteran with mental health issues?  
4 So that's a problem. We had tried to facilitate,  
5 but I had several meetings with ADA people in Cyrus  
6 Vance's office trying to come up with a formula to  
7 identify veterans when they come into the criminal  
8 justice system and we couldn't get it done and it  
9 was rebuffed.  
10

11 And lastly, whereas we talk about  
12 Treatment Courts, Treatment Courts are fine, but  
13 years ago, we started with people with substance  
14 abuse problems in Treatment Courts; treatments  
15 without necessarily having a judge particularly  
16 focusing on that; I mean specifically. I could  
17 talk about some people that we deal with; Brooklyn,  
18 in Brooklyn Criminal Court, where we actually spoke  
19 to... there was a female judge and we got the  
20 veteran released to our custody and we took him to  
21 the Brooklyn Hospital, got him detoxed, and I'll  
22 make a long story short, and he now works as an  
23 engineer at St. Albans. So there are stories, but  
24 my last statement is the Treatment Courts are fine,  
25 but there is a lot of veterans that have more

serious issues that need to be addressed and in law, as lawyers know, there is such a thing in law called mitigating extenuating circumstances and a lot of these guys just go bananas. They really do. It's not a total reflection. We're not saying they shouldn't be punished, but they should get... they should go to receive some kind of mental health treatment and not just treatment for substance abuse. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Mr. Daniels, thank you for your testimony. The last person to testify is ironically from my district. He is known affectionately as the Rockaway Tiger and that is Mr. Paul Schubert.

PAUL SCHUBERT: Thank you. I found this in World War II, alright. Now, basically I'm here for the rule of law. When I went to MOVA to see Latisha Russaw and I showed her a photograph on my tablet of Leslie Goldberg, a Vietnam veteran, Navy, and told her that we're having problems with the 109th Precinct in Flushing. Captain Ng, N g, told Leslie if he shows up there they will hawk his license, even though he has a dismissal from the Criminal Court of Queens. Now on top of the

1 Supreme Court building it says, "A true  
2 administration of justice is the strongest pillar  
3 of a good government." Now, Miss Latisha doubted  
4 that he was even a veteran. "Where is his DD214?"  
5 I told her, "It's not necessary." I have a signed,  
6 notarized affidavit grant to act. I am here as his  
7 special agent." Now, Congressman Crowley's office  
8 called the 109th Precinct. They did not put her  
9 through to the Inspector. Congress Lady Grace Meng  
10 called them. Also, the New York State Senate,  
11 Assembly, Rafael Espinal, Mr. Costa... I can't  
12 pronounce his last name. Anyway, he's Leslie's  
13 councilman. And I went down to speak to Community  
14 Affairs. Now, I would like to know if the rule of  
15 law if Inspector Brian Maguire has to respect the  
16 fact that Leslie has a license and there are lot of  
17 veterans who have gone to court with this license,  
18 had their cases dismissed on many occasions and I  
19 believe that when a criminal judge says a license  
20 is valid, that should be... it should be over, not  
21 telling me how many judges ruled. And also, my  
22 friend Francisco [sic] Cabrera, who also lived...  
23 he's a neighbor of mine. If a veteran has a  
24 criminal history, consumer affairs denies them  
25

licenses. A lot of times the only license they can get is the Hawkins [sic] license.

Now, I went to Albany in 2004 for disabled veterans and so I'm just asking that you know [chime] just be looking at...

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: As we did with the previous panels, you'll get the chance to rate the job performance of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs from one to 10, one being terrible, 10 being outstanding, just the number. No explanation needed. I have a feeling where this is going, but Paul Schubert, one to 10.

PAUL SCHUBERT: Two.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, let's go to Lionelle.

LIONELLE HAMANAKA: I can't answer that question because I don't think it's... fair.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, Mr. Daniels.

EDWARD DANIELS: Five.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Five, alright.  
Any questions? Alright, this hearing is adjourned.  
Thank you very much.

[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. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Date:

\_\_\_\_ 06/27/2014 \_\_\_\_\_