

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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October 27, 2014
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway- Committee Rm, 16th Fl.

B E F O R E:
ERIC A. ULRICH
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
ALAN N. MAISEL
ANDREW COHEN
FERNANDO CABRERA
PAUL A. VALLONE

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

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon.

Today is Monday, October 27th in case you are like me and you forget what day it is. My name is Eric Ulrich. I'm the chairman of the Council's Committee of the Veteran's Committee. Today we are here to consider the work, the good work of the Veterans Advisory Board, VAB. The Board was created along with the establishment of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs in 1987 so that New York City's veterans would have an official platform to voice their concerns to officials and city government. Board members are appointed by the mayor and the speaker of the City Council and are given the broad mandate of ad, of advising the Commissioner of MOVA and all matters concerning veterans. To ensure the proper representation of veterans across the city current law only requires that the board have at least one member from each of the five boroughs. The current law also recognizes the, the special sacrifice of those who have served our nation's military through our various conflicts by requiring the mayor and the speaker to consider such service men and women when making their appointments.

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2 Presently the board is required to meet regularly
3 and submit an annual report on their activities.
4 While we recognize and appreciate the work that
5 these board members do most importantly on a
6 volunteer basis some veterans are of the belief
7 that the board could, could do better, could do
8 more. The advocates seek more input and engagement
9 in the board's work as well as greater openness and
10 transparency. They have expressed a desire to see
11 the board make concrete proposals to MOVA .And a
12 lot of folks in the veterans community those at
13 home and those returning from abroad in the coming
14 years all need the support that the city can give
15 them. So the Veterans Advisory Board can be an
16 important advocate for the need and, and a way for
17 veteran, the needs of veterans and a way for
18 veterans to participate directly in city
19 government. So before we hear from the Commissioner
20 of MOVA I do want to acknowledge my colleagues who
21 have joined us to my left politically but in
22 seating only Paul Vallone from Queens, to my right
23 again not politically but only in seating Ellen
24 Maisel of Brooklyn, Andy Cohen of the Bronx and
25 where's Fernando Cabrera, he's in the elevator. I

1
2 thought I just saw him. Okay and Fernando Cabrera
3 was here and is probably on his way back so. Before
4 we get started I'll ask the Committee Council to
5 swear in the administration.

6 COMMITTEE COUNCIL: Do you affirm to
7 tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
8 the truth in your testimony before this committee
9 and to respond honestly to council member
10 questions.

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I do.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay we should
13 probably swear in the council members at this
14 point. Anyway... sworn out so... sworn in right. So
15 we're joined today first and foremost by the newly
16 appointed Mayors of the, the newly appointed
17 commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans
18 Affairs Loree Sutton. And the floor is yours.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Good afternoon
20 Chairman Ulrich and members of the City Council
21 Committee on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton and
22 it is my privilege to serve as Commissioner of
23 Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. Thank you for
24 this opportunity to participate in this hearing
25 concerning oversight of the New York City Veterans

1
2 Advisory Board. During these early weeks of my
3 tenor as MOVA Commissioner I've come to appreciate
4 the role and responsibilities of the New York City
5 Veterans Advisory Board. This important body
6 commissioned by the City Council has council, MOVA
7 commissioner, the mayor, and the speaker of the
8 council on issues important to the New York City
9 veterans community. The New York City Veterans
10 Advisory Board is advised the MOVA commissioner on
11 issues such as establishment of veterans courts,
12 capital alignment for enhanced services, make that
13 capital alignment realignment for enhanced services
14 with respect to preserving and enhancing the role
15 of the Manhattan campus of the VA New York Harbor
16 Healthcare System, support for Junior ROTC and ROTC
17 programs in New York City's education systems,
18 support of veteran organizations becoming
19 organizational friends in the burial of veterans in
20 the absence of known relatives, and engagement with
21 the Department of Consumer Affairs addressing
22 issues concerning veteran vending licenses, rights,
23 and responsibilities. Most recently at its
24 September 2014 quarterly meeting the Veterans
25 Advisory Board addressed topics ranging from the

filing of DD214s at the County Clerk Offices, New York state real estate exemption eliminating the school tax multiplier, New York state veterans benefits outreach to recently discharged veterans in the New York City area and participation in upcoming events to honor veterans during the November 2014 veterans day week events. I am grateful to all Veterans Advisory Board Members past and present for their contributions to the wellbeing of New York City veterans and their loved ones. Accordingly I heartily support the enduring role and critical importance of maintaining an active and robust Veterans Advisory Board to assist me and future MOVA commissioners in executing our duties informed by the perspectives of nine veteran leaders representing all five boroughs of New York City. Going forward I anticipate continued productive collaboration with the Veterans Advisory Board and greatly appreciate the service and sacrifice of all who have stepped forward to serve in this critical capacity. Thank you again for this opportunity to meet with you today. I look forward to continuing our work together on behalf of all

New York City veterans and their loved ones. At this time I welcome your questions and comments.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay thank you Commissioner Sutton. Are there any questions for the administration before I begin questions? Okay I'll, I'll, I'll have a few before we let you off the hook. So the focus of the hearing today is of course examining the Veterans Advisory Board. And I guess the first question that the committee would like to ask the administration is what are some of the issues and concerns that your, that you, I know that you're new but you and your office which is not so new has coordinated with the Veterans Advisory Board on? What are some of the early issues that in your early meetings that they've been bringing to your attention?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Certainly. I attended the September quarterly meeting and I listed my testimony some of the issues that were discussed there. I think as important as the quarterly meetings at least to this point in my tenor has been the ongoing dialogue and collaboration that I had been able to draw from in particular the board chairman Mr. McGowan but also

1 other members of the board including Lee Covino
2 and, and John Rowell [sic], Rowan and others. So I
3 think that for me in these early weeks the Veterans
4 Advisory Board has been a very important source of
5 both history of which as you know there has been
6 quite a bit leading us to where we currently are in
7 sight. While we may not always agree on every issue
8 that comes forward that's the value of having an
9 independent advisory board. And I think in terms of
10 particular issues going forward I think that I will
11 be looking to the veterans advisory board to help
12 me help the mayor help us address really the range
13 of issues and concerns of all ages, all eras of
14 veterans and their loved ones. So I think that will
15 cover a, a large spectrum of issues some of which
16 have been addressed others of which remain to be
17 addressed. So I will be glad to elaborate further
18 as time goes, goes forward.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And, and just, just
21 for clarification when is your I don't want to say
22 probationary period but when is your... that's a bad
23 word to use... honeymoon, no that's, that's not a
24 good word to use either. When, when is your
25

1 listening session going to be complete? I think you
2 said 90 days... [cross-talk]

3 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I, I promised the
4 Mayor a 90 day assessment.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right assessment,
6 assessment period. [cross-talk]

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes. [cross-talk]
8 So the first of December will have been 90 days and
9 I will then look forward to laying down the
10 findings from my assessment to the mayor. He...
11 [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Will you share them
13 with the council and... [cross-talk]

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Certainly.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...the VAB, yeah.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Certainly. And
17 we'll then as the mayor adopts his strategy drawing
18 in part from my assessment and recommendations then
19 we'll definitely be glad to sit down with you and
20 go over the strategy.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay so we'll,
22 we'll look for a report or some sort of official
23 list of recommendations or proposals I suppose and
24 the direction that the mayor wants to take the
25

1 Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. And so I
2 appreciate you testifying. As always you, I think
3 you're doing a phenomenal job. I know you have a, a
4 difficult job and you had very big shoes to fill.
5 But I appreciate you being here and I always
6 appreciate you staying to listen to some of the
7 testimony from some of the other folks so thank you
8 Commissioner for coming, thank you.

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10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you Mr.
11 Chair.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright. So we will
13 now have the first panel so I suppose that they'll
14 be speaking on behalf of the board members who
15 currently serve on the Veterans Advisory Board. We
16 have our good friend Vince McGowan and we also have
17 John Rowan Are we forgetting anybody else who's on
18 the board who signed up to speak, that's it? Okay.
19 Thank you. We will ask the Sergeant in Arms, not
20 the Sergeant in Arms the Committee Council to swear
21 in the board members.

22 COMMITTEE COUNCIL: Do you affirm to
23 tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
24 the truth in your testi9mony before this committee
25 and to respond honestly to council questions.

UNKNOWN MALE: Yes I do.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Alright.

Please proceed and I suppose Vince is going to start. Thank you.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: Thank you Chairman Ulrich for the opportunity. Thank you council members. It's been great watching the process in this new administration both in the city council and with the mayor's office putting so much focus on the needs of the veteran's community. My name is Vincent McGowen. I am the Chair of the city's Veterans Advisory Board, VAB. The VAB was chartered in 1987 under Local Law 53 to advise the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs on all matters concerning veterans. In 2002 Local Law 45 expanded the VAB from five to nine members, five appointed by the mayor and four appointed by the city council with each borough represented on the board. In 2006 Intro 233 enhanced the structure of the VAB and added annual reporting requirements. The first chairman of the VAB was elected in 2008. This document is a result of input from all the board members... let everyone know that I'm in committee. At a recent VAB meet, VAB meeting held on September

16th a resolution was passed unanimously to keep the current chairman myself and Vice Chairman Lee Covino on any future VAB entity for one term in a non-voting capacity if necessary so as to provide continuity and avoid the loss of the deep institutional memory. First I would like to express the VAB's appreciation to the Committee on Veterans, the Committee on Veterans for giving us the opportunity to comment on the future relationship between our city and our community. Over the years the VAB has worked closely with the mayor's office and the city council on a myriad of issues affecting today's veterans. It is hoped by now the old days of thinking veterans are strictly a federal issue are over. Veterans also need local programs and the revenues that could be realized by the city through veteran business initiatives and increased numbers of successful VA claims are hopefully a no-brainer at this point. However the VAB is cautious with supporting a change from our current successful relationship because of the current transition with the new commissioner at MOVA the temporary replacement of MO, of, replacement of MOVA's offices and the implications

of this unfunded mandate during a, a delicate physical time. VAB believes that MOVA is already underfunded and the fact that three trained veterans claims, councilors were recently not included in the budget and lost last month only adds to our concerns. Where will these funds to create, a entire agency come from is our question. What kind of changes and or interpretation of current MOVA services would occur if this legislation is passed. Why is there no inclusion of reservists and national guards who would have been activated to serve in the military in the current definitions. Further VAB recommends adapting the state definition of a veteran for continuity. Further we would recommend that the new state OGS programs for, for disabled veteran business enterprises also be included in Section 31-302. VAB recommends further study and revision of proposed legislation through a sub-committee which would also include members of the committee on small business. Following are some of the issues that the Veterans Advisory Board has discussed and subsequently received action on with prior administrations. VAB recommended a review of MOVA

that resulted in a change of leadership and the assignment of a commissioner level position up from its traditional director status. VAB recommended and helped implement the digital connectivity of the MOVA website. VAB developed interest, support, and public information for veterans courts. VAB developed mayoral support for keeping our VA treatment center at 23rd street stopping the sale of the property to developers. VAB raised the administration's awareness of the importance of our treatment center at St. Albans. VAB encouraged the administration to develop support for Junior and Senior ROTC programs in New York City educational systems. VAB work, worked with MOVA to develop a process requiring New York City agencies to designate a veterans liaison in all departments to work with MOVA on opportunities for our veterans community. VAB increased the communications with, within our community by bringing citywide veteran leadership together and connecting the boroughs. VAB worked with industry and not-for-profits to increase attention to the need for burial services for veteran, for the veteran community including identifying unmarked graves. VAB met with the

Department of Consumer Affairs to address issues of permitting and veteran preference for vending rights. VAB raised awareness throughout the community on the need to honor service and recognize the value of the veterans community in New York City. VAB helped the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs developed as New York City federal priorities for the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. VAB has complied with all requirements as directed under the Local Law, under the Local Law that created it. In closing the Veterans Advisory Board looks, looks forward to further city council review and development of a committee charged with reviewing the proposed legislation recommending the inclusion of New York City small business services and to the completion of a process to include Intro 314 and in, into New York City after we understand the ramifications it would present to our veterans into the City of New York. Sorry for the typos on that. Thank you very much and there are three attachments included in this testimony. One is the Veterans Advisory Board annual report that would show where some of the items that I highlighted were introduced in 2013 but every year going back

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2 there was a, an annual report that would have
3 something in it about all the items that I
4 mentioned, a list of the federal priorities and
5 the, the 2013 press release from the city requiring
6 agencies to designate a veterans liaison. That is
7 my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to
8 address the board.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Vince.
10 John did you want to speak briefly.

11 JOHN ROWAN: Yeah briefly just you know
12 I, I... support everything Vinny was talking about.
13 He really gives us a good synopsis of what we've
14 been doing over the last several years. The key to
15 me is that, that the name of our group it's the
16 Veterans Advisory Board, we advise. And I think
17 that given the makeup of the board we've had over
18 the years has really been a pretty good mix. I mean
19 in the early days it was mostly us old guys from
20 the Vietnam vet era or earlier. But we've since
21 changed over the several years with different
22 appointments and we've gotten really good mix. A
23 couple of the women have been really great by the
24 way and it's good to have them on board and some of
25 the younger vets bring in a whole different

perspective obviously. But it's nice to have us old folks around because we have the institutional memory that allows us to, to not forget where the bodies are buried and, and get things done. So you know just glad to see that we, I hope we continue and we'd like to see our, our ability enhanced. I would add one other thing. It would really help us at the Veterans Advisory Board if we had colleagues in the boroughs. In some boroughs they have a very active Veterans Advisory Group, some don't have much of one. Some are very informal. Some are very structured. Really runs to gamut but it would be interesting to have a conversation with all the borough presidents to get them more involved should it... that way we have representatives of each of the boroughs on the board which is a great thing. It'd be nice if we could spread the wealth out, get some other areas where they could meet, greet, talk to each other, and find out what's going on in local communities. Because a lot of them have very different approaches to things.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I have some questions but I'm going to hold them. I want my

colleagues to get a chance to ask the board members questions first. So Andrew Cohen of the Bronx.

COUNCIL MEMBR COHEN: Thank you for your testimony gentleman. You started to talk a little bit about the makeup of the VAB and the backgrounds. Could you just expand that a little bit if you think that there is a, if there's something that's lacking in perspective, if there's something that...

JOHN ROWAN: No actually I think they've, done a pretty good job. I mean it's, it's kind of a strange thing because we got these two appointing bodies. You've got the, the mayor's office and then you've got the Council. And some of this... I think we, Vinny and I've been on this since day one. They started this thing and then we've got other people who've only come on in the last year or so. But it's real, I think over time it's been able to, to keep its balance very well. I, veterans are a strange group. I mean we, we're both sexes, all sexual orientation, all races, colors, you name it we got it. And, and I think while we may not everything represented in that Veterans Advisory Board and I think we've got a fairly good mix.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: We, we call it a mosaic.

JOHN ROWAN: Yes.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: The way it's broken out so... And we're very comfortable with it that way actually.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: You know and on the, the agency issue do you think that you know I mean one of the reasons I support the legislation is I think that maybe as, at an agency level it would bring more resources. That's really I think you know the hope of people with this legislation.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: Well that, that's the point of having a committee to make sure that the legislation would include everything. We'd like to start off with as powerful of a, an approach as possible given the urgency of the, of, of the situation with troops coming home. We just left, we're leaving Afghanistan as we speak by the end of the year. Crains [sic] last year notified us that we're going to have 40 thousand veterans coming back into New York as these things wind down and we all hope they do. But what about these men and women who are coming home. We go back to the day

1 when the news, when the newspapers all had to do
2 with the angry Vietnam veteran getting into
3 altercations, fights, arrests, all the negativity.
4 That was because there was nobody there. There was
5 no, there was no social net for us to hang on and
6 we lost many of our good members because of that.
7 We don't want that to see, we, we don't want to see
8 that happen to this next generation.
9

10 JOHN ROWAN: Yeah the, the, I, I really
11 support this, this, this idea of a department
12 mainly because of it, it would give us an
13 opportunity hopefully to get the funding they would
14 go out in a way of grants to local entities. We
15 don't need to build a big ruckus. Just... the veteran
16 service organizations have plenty of people that we
17 could help fund and, and give us support and do
18 certain things whatever it is that we'd like to do,
19 not the least of which is having a claims service.
20 One of the biggest voids we have in the city of New
21 York is the ability to find people and help people
22 file claims with the VA which as Vinny pointed out
23 earlier in his testimony it's a, we spend billions,
24 literally give away billions in this city to a tax,
25 get tax breaks, give people that, trying to bring

1 in industry and dollars. The federal government
2 sends us millions upon millions if not billions of
3 dollars every year to the veterans living here in
4 the city of New York. Well you think that would be
5 a lot more if more of the veterans knew what they
6 were entitled to. And the only way you can do that
7 is have somebody file a claim for them. And we used
8 to have service officers in each of the boroughs
9 years ago. The state used to have a hundred. Now
10 they're down to like 50 so... And they used to have
11 more in the boroughs, they're all gone except maybe
12 in the hospitals. So the other... and, and why I... it,
13 the, special department is important my chapter
14 does get some money thanks to the city council
15 members in Queens, my Queens chapter in, of Vietnam
16 veterans of America but they have to do all their
17 grants through the DYCD. And they have to get
18 somebody else to act as a, as a, as a fiscal
19 representative. We think if we had a, our own
20 department we'd be able to work directly with them,
21 contract through them. And I used to work for the
22 city council and used to oversee the Contracts
23 Committee so...

24
25 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright Council
Member Vallone from Queens.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good afternoon
gentleman and thank you Commissioner in general for
your testimony. I really interested on expanding to
the boroughs, what you were saying John. So what
would be the first steps to make that happen.

JOHN ROWAN: Well I mean the borough,
the borough presidents can make that happen. Many
of them do. They have, they, a lot of them have
committees or a, a variation and theme. I mean the
Borough President... she came in. We've had two
meetings now but it's been like everybody who's
even so remotely related. And she comes in and they
do some, you know we give her some information or
something. But they could formalize that more maybe
with some of the larger veteran service
organizations or some other appointed groups that
would meet on a regular basis kind of like a VAB in
the borough. And I know they do that fairly well in
the Bronx and Brooklyn. I'm not familiar enough
with Staten, I think Staten Island has something
similar.

VINCENT MCGOWAN: Yeah they do.

1
2 JOHN ROWAN: And Manhattan I'm not sure
3 about. I don't know if they still do... did they do
4 that in Manhattan Commander? No they used to.

5 VINCENT MCGOWAN: No they used to,
6 right.

7 JOHN ROWAN: Years ago they used to have
8 these things. Every, by the way almost everything
9 we look at today, I hate to say this goes back to
10 1946. And if you look at the Mayor's Office of
11 Veterans Affairs in 1946 it was a hell of a lot
12 bigger than it is today. And it had a good reason
13 to be obviously but, but we do too so... It, it could
14 be easily done but it would be a matter of sitting
15 down with the borough presidents. I can't step on
16 their prerogatives but I think they, I think all of
17 them would be interested to know that they would
18 have this kind of influence.

19 VINCENT MCGOWAN: And to, to further on
20 that question Mr. Vallone. The board had passed a
21 resolution this last year, I think it was the end
22 of 2013 that we want to start holding the meetings
23 in the different boroughs, not always just in
24 Manhattan. I think that would be a way of getting
25 the attention of the, of the boroughs by bringing

you know the body to them and then working from there.

JOHN ROWAN: It might also allow for more input from the, from other people other than the members of the advisory board. I mean it, it's not that we hold closed meetings it's just by the time we get through it in the reading room we're in it's not conducive to have a ton of people stare at us and watch the meetings. They're, they're open meetings.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well that's one of the concerns that we would like to see going forward. Because I hear that out in my neck of the woods they would like to have more of that interaction. Sometimes it goes both ways. They don't know who to reach out to versus being overwhelmed with you know what needs to be done with the new vets coming back versus the issues from the different vets and the different generations. I think the encouraging part is you have a chair now and a mayor and a, and a council that's really focusing on how we can do more for veterans. And I, I think this is the, with our new commissioner in place and with the group that we

1
2 have now is the time to put anything that may have
3 been on the table before to make it happen.

4 JOHN ROWAN: So most of the board
5 members now our, our terms have expired but all of
6 the board members except for Lee Covino for family
7 issues have agreed to stay on on a, on a regular
8 basis as this process unfolds just so we don't lose
9 the momentum and don't lose the connectivity. Lee
10 is a critical piece of the memory and the, and the
11 information for, you know for the, the board. And
12 we're looking forward to working with whatever the
13 decisions that are made by the mayor's office and
14 the city council for new members to help them
15 understand where we came from and what the, what
16 the possibilities for them are in the future. And
17 obviously if we're going to have a department that
18 opens up a tremendous amount of new space for
19 everyone.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you
21 gentleman.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright thank you
23 Council Member Vallone. I, I have a few questions.
24 I'll group them together before we move onto the
25 next panel. I suppose the purpose of this hearing

1 obviously is to acquaint the VAB in a very formal
2 way to the new commissioner of Mayor's Office of
3 Veterans Affairs and also to examine ways because
4 that's the purpose of oversight hearings in general
5 is to see how we can do things better. No one is
6 saying that you're doing a terrible job, we think
7 you're doing an excellent job and Vince under your
8 leadership the VAB really has made a difference,
9 there's no question about that but...

11 VINCENT MCGOWAN: Thank you sir.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...I think that if
13 there was a way for us to in self-reflective ways
14 see if there's any way we would increase
15 transparency. We, as you mentioned that was an idea
16 that I think you brought up at a previous hearing,
17 bringing those meetings to each borough hall maybe
18 because you don't have to pay for rent, the city
19 owns those buildings right.

20 VINCENT MCGOWAN: Right.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And, and letting
22 people know in advance when those meetings were
23 taking place, maybe opening them to the public, not
24 that they take part in the meeting but that, that
25 they can attend the meeting. You know just engaging

the veterans community throughout the five boroughs not you know as John mentioned always having the meetings in Manhattan or letting people think that they're closed to the public or that you're having these closed door meetings. We know that's not the case but there are thousands and thousands of veterans throughout the five boroughs that are unaware of the veteran's advisory board are not familiar with the good work that you do on an annual basis. And we want to make it more transparent, more accessible and, and bring it to the people. So I mean if, if that's something that you think is a good idea that might be something that the council and, and the members of this committee would like, would like to put into law. So that's I think before we draft any bill or any legislation of, or consider any measure seriously we want to have this hearing first and then have separate you know other meetings, not privately but off the record about what we think the VAB should look like, how many members it should have, where it meets, how we translate all that information to the public, what the report looks like, are there specific recommendations that the VAB will be

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VINCENT MCGOWAN: Well you know we've always suffered from the lack of any sort of funding. Even to the extent of you know business cards or letterhead. So it falls to the different members to absorb all that. And the mandate that we're working under is not so specific as to, as to you know charge us to go running out there in any particular direction. We, we've, are, I think we've tried to keep the relationships flowing between the boroughs and the mayor's office and the respective

members that have assigned the different individuals to the board. You know we only get a crack at 'em four times a year. We talk, we're all on the emails a lot but we only have a chance to meet at, at, we could meet more often but you know there's only so much that we can expect from people who are taking the time out. And everyone who's involved in the board operates at some other leadership capacity. So they have to take care of whatever the constituency is that, that's supporting them to get to the point of being assigned to the board. So we don't want to burden the individuals, particularly the young ones, the younger veterans who are starting their jobs, starting their lives. We're at the point now, we're at the retired side so we see more of it but when we were all at a different age and time and family and other things... want to keep them in and not close them out by the fact that they can't participate. So there's a balance here. You want to be able to encourage them to be in but not make them feel bad because they can't participate at the same level.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. John did you have anything you wanted to add before we move on?

JOHN ROWAN: Yeah I would just like to add that one of the things I'd like to see us talk about more and maybe the committee can get into this a little bit is the role of the state. The state of New York's Department, Division of Veterans Affairs as I say has been around forever again going back to the post-World War II era and they were the basic, they, first of all they provide funding to the city as they do with all the other counties in the state by the way. It's based on, it's an old formula that's outdated and based on population and all kinds of other crazy things and... could actually be used to revisit that. Some of the things that we do for veterans are based on the state law. So for instance the indigent veterans burial program that we are involved in and a lot of my chapter's been doing a lot of and some of the legion and VFW and others. I mean it, we, there's a certain amount of money that can go to the funeral director, I don't think that's changed in 50 years. Things like that. Some of our colleagues out in, in Nassau and Suffolk

County have worked with some of the state senators out there and have gotten some really good money coming down to do some PTSD programs in the community. And I know we have a lot of community service where people here in New York City obviously can help provide mental health counselling and other kinds of programs. So it'd be interesting perhaps to just kind of team up. As I said the division of veterans affairs used to have counsellors in every borough and, and the hospitals and used to have a bunch of them. They've since cut back over the years very severely. So now you basically only find one or two and you find them in the hospital and that's about it or, or the St. Albans outpatient clinic. So we could use you to nudge our friends in the state to give us some more funding.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'll do my best.

Alright. Thank you gentlemen. We're going to call up the next panel. Jason Hansman Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Craig Caruana America Works of New York, and also from America Works Matthew Silverstein. Yeah, okay thanks. Thank you. We'll ask the Committee Council to swear in

the folks who are here to testify. And we will limit the testimony of each speaker to four minutes because we have quite a few.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL: Please raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to council member questions?

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay let's start with Mathew. Got to put the mic on.

MATTHEW SILVERSTEIN: Thank you Councilman Ulrich for letting us speak today, myself Matt Silverstein and Craig Caruana we're here on behalf of America Works of New York. And we are a contractor of the city and the federal government to help unemployed veterans and their families return back to the workplace. We've been in business since 1984 and we've placed over 400 thousand hard... individuals getting back into the workplace including 12 veterans, including homeless veterans, veterans who are on public assistance like welfare and food stamps, formerly incarcerated veterans, youth aging out of foster care, and veterans receiving SSI or SSDI from the federal

1 government. We started working with veterans here
2 in New York City at about 2008 in which at that
3 time we started a pilot program with MOVA with the
4 former commissioner and partnership with the Human
5 Resource Administration because we were contracted
6 to help people who were on food stamps and welfare
7 get back into the workplace. And we saw at that
8 time a large number of veterans coming into
9 offices. And there wasn't any sort of program for
10 them to, to get services. The commissioner of HRA
11 allowed us at that time to help veterans who were
12 on food stamps join our program. And we started
13 working with MOVA. We actually had an office down
14 at MOVA where we were enrolling people and then
15 bringing them into our, our offices to get placed
16 into jobs. That program lasted for a few months and
17 then we stopped having an office at MOVA because
18 there weren't any veterans coming into the office.
19 I guess over the years we're now a contractor of
20 both the Social Security Administration with the
21 ticket to work program that I run nationally we
22 were able to help any veteran who's on social
23 security who's between the ages of 18 and 65 get
24 jobs and Craig who oversees our program through the
25

1
2 homeless veterans reintegration program so we're
3 contractor of the Department of Labor and we're
4 able to help any homeless veteran or any veteran
5 who's in jeopardy of homelessness get back to work.
6 And I think one of the problems is that we over the
7 years don't know who to go to and, and who to
8 educate that our program is there. We, we would
9 like to see a better, a working relationship
10 between ourselves and the Veterans Advisory Board
11 as well as MOVA so that people know of, of our
12 services, and our services are free to veterans.
13 And our goal is just to help veterans get back to
14 work and we would like to help with that. I'll turn
15 it over to Craig too so he can go over...

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. We'll...
17 clock for Craig so he can continue the testimony.

18 CRAIG CARUANA: Thank you. So just... some
19 of the kind of recommendations when we heard of
20 this committee coming up one of our frustrations,
21 and you know it's probably not the people at MOVA's
22 fault but I think, we think it would be very
23 helpful if MOVA had a mission statement, a mission
24 statement and a matrix to see if their goals are
25 being achieved and then have the veterans advisory

board... certain oversight for those metrics. So sometimes you know this way everyone's held accountable, there's go-to people, you could have you know some sort of process like Matt was saying and Councilman Ulrich had said earlier transparency is everything. And it's not because people at MOVA aren't well motivated but it can be difficult for an outside organization like ours that do have a lot of services. We feel like we have to rent, reinvent the wheel of relationships you know every couple of years as new staff comes onboard. And then especially with MOVA lacking a clear mission statement it could be hard to know when we should reach out to them or when we're just bugging them or when they should reach out to us. For example one area we thought oversight would have been very effective one great relationship we had with MOVA was what they called a veterans boutique. So if a homeless veteran came into our organization we were able to refer them to MOVA very often the same day and they would be able to get interview attire clothing. So, and the clothing was excellent. It, they were great suits, shirt, ties, shoes often, and we would be able to send them on a job

1 interview. And then we got an email saying this
2 basically in November, November 21st that that's
3 just going to come to an end. And now look there
4 might be good reasons, maybe the funding dried up,
5 maybe you're not getting clothing anymore from
6 donations. I don't know what it is but if there was
7 a, if there was better oversight you know maybe
8 that oversight could have said hey this is going to
9 affect a lot of organizations out there. This is
10 going to fend, this is going to hurt the most
11 neediest veterans those that are literally in the
12 shelter and, or you could have said reach out to
13 America Works if you're having trouble and maybe we
14 could have helped out. We've held clothing drives
15 in the past for MOVA and if there was a problem
16 this is something our organization would have
17 jumped on immediately because it's such a help to
18 our homeless veterans program. We discussed
19 transparency and another issue we even tried to
20 check today the MOVA's website for dates and times
21 of when the Veteran Advisory Board meets and we
22 weren't able to find it. You know if there was a
23 single point of contact if the minutes of the
24 meeting were published online... that, that just... be

1 I think a big help to organizations but a lot of
2 returning veterans I'm sure you're all aware these
3 days are very young. They're going to go to the
4 internet right away. Something I've seen from
5 veterans is from post-Vietnam war it's like where
6 do you go? You got the American Legion, maybe a VFW
7 Hall. Today it's almost the opposite. It's like
8 where don't you go. You got Facebook groups, you
9 got IEVAs out there having happy hours every other
10 week. You have your traditional parents telling you
11 go to you know the, the VFW Hall. Every single
12 company in America says they want to hire veterans,
13 how true that turns out to be you know go see. But
14 it's an overload of information is the point. So
15 the more detailed these days I think an
16 organization could be whether it be MOVA or whoever
17 the better off the veteran's going to be. With that
18 point those are our major kind of recommendations
19 right now. I'd be happy to yield the rest of the
20 time to any questions y'all have.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We're going to
23 continue to Jason then we'll, then we'll circle
24 back with the question. Jason Hansman from IABA.

JASON HANSMAN: [off mic] Thank you so much. [on mic] Thank you so much Chairman Ulrich, distinguished members of the committee. On behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America I would like to extend our gratitude for being given this opportunity to share with you our views and recommendations regarding the New York City Veterans Advisory Board and policy recommendations for New York City. Serving our veterans in New York City is a top priority for IAVA and is critically important issues that affect the lives of tens and thousands of service men and women and our veterans. With over 200 thousand veterans estimated to be living in New York City 3,500 of those which are IAVA members and the role of city government including the Veteran Advisory Board it is crucial to the implementation development of benefits and services that would directly improve the lives of veterans and their families. Additionally with new leadership at the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and an emerging drive to establish a new city department specifically for veterans affairs New York City is in a unique position to become a municipal leader on veterans issues. As the largest

non-profit non-partisan organization dedicated to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America supports a revitalized VAB for New York City and its veterans. We have included in our written testimony as exhibit A comprehensive policy recommendations for New York City and its veterans to include combatting suicide and supporting mental health initiatives strengthening New York City government for today's veterans, defending the military and veterans educational benefits, employing the new greatest generation and strengthening support for veterans and their families. We will further distribute these recommendations through the VAB at their next meeting. Unfortunately many veterans in New York City are not aware of the Veterans Advisory Board and the role that it plays within city government. For our members who are aware many believe that historically it has not been taken seriously and that it has not had the impact on the lives of veterans and their families that it should. Others believe that there's a generational gap on the board and that student veterans are not fairly represented. Despite the historical challenges of

the veterans advisory board we believe that there is an opportunity to revitalize the initiative and accurately represent veterans of New York City through the following recommendations. Publicly record and publish meeting minutes to increase transparency and communications. Ensure that members are actively participating and for those who do become regularly inactive ask that they step down from their position. Better represent the large number of student veterans in the city. And include more veterans and representatives from non-standard veterans organizations. It is important to recognize the efforts of the Veteran Advisory Board and the New York City Council who have made to engage veterans in New York City and to address issues critical to the community. But there is still a considerable amount of work that needs to be done; revitalizing the VAB, combatting suicide and supporting mental initiatives, strengthening New York City government for today's veterans, defending military and veteran educational benefits, employing the new greatest generation, and strengthening support for veterans and their families requires a comprehensive approach. And

1 while there is no illusion that the VAB will solve
2 all the problems our community faces we believe
3 that there is an opportunity to revitalize the VAB
4 to create a significant and positive impact in the
5 lives of veterans and their families. Again we
6 appreciate the opportunity offer our views on this
7 important topic and we look forward to continually,
8 continuing to work with each of you, your staff,
9 and this committee to improve the lives of veterans
10 and their families. Thank you for your time and
11 attention.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
14 testimony. Council Member Vallone do you have any
15 questions before we move on?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I, I have, I
17 have a few and then I'll, I'll defer to you. Do you
18 think that a lot of the challenges that the VAB
19 faces could be addressed if they had funding? I
20 happen to be of that opinion but I don't know in
21 your dealings with them if you think that would
22 help. Do you think the board could benefit from any
23 direct funding? And do you think that that's one of
24 the reasons why they, they, they're unable to carry
25 out a clear mission or, or, or able to do a lot of

the things that we would like them to do, they don't get any money to do it, we're not paying for it. I mean do you think that's one of the problems?

CRAIG CARUANA: Short answer generally speaking is yes if it's tied to a clear mission statement. I think that would be, that would be very helpful. One of the first things we noticed on the testimony, think it was their testimony with the email address correct? We, we thought, and again sometimes the... matter, they don't even get VAB email addresses. And it...

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: City, you mean [dot]NYC... [cross-talk]

CRAIG CARUANA: Yeah, exactly.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well that, that's, that's an idea... [cross-talk]

CRAIG CARUANA: And it...

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Sure that's...

CRAIG CARUANA: ...you know it seem, it might seem small but if you're, you know it, it kind of just goes to well does the city take veterans seriously.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Right well that, that, I think that's, that's something that

maybe should be looked at, would do it, we can get it... hopefully...

CRAIG CARUANA: And it seems small but you know it's indicative of the larger problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And also I think one of you mentioned publishing the, the dates and the times and the locations of the meetings on MOVA's website for instance. So that, that, these seem like a lot of IT issues but, but things that could be worked out relatively you know easily. So Jason you wanted to add to that?

JASON HANSMAN: Yeah I, I think we, we must give them a clear mandating, clear deliverable as if we're going to give them funding. I, I think at the same time a lot of the recommendations could be done without funding. Certainly a lot of the recommendations that we laid out would not require the funding of New York City to the board. This is not to say that it wouldn't be a good thing for the board but I think the accountability has to be there.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay do you, do you think that if MOVA were to become its own independent city agency should the Veterans

1
2 Advisory Board be retained as a part of the agency,
3 to advise it internally, or should it be, continue
4 to be something separate and apart from a city
5 agency.

6 JASON HANSMAN: I, I think having
7 separate and having, you know still that community
8 feel to it I think is important. Having it you know
9 advising both the mayor and the department at the
10 same time. And potentially advising this committee
11 and the entirety council I think is going to be
12 for, you know for the betterment of the city.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: What, what do you
14 think about expanding the number of appointees
15 taking it. It went from five to nine and, and
16 taking it to 11. I mean that's, that was an idea
17 that came out of one of previous hearings. Do you
18 think that would be helpful? And what group do you
19 think, what group of veterans do you think is not
20 represented by the Veterans Advisory Board.

21 JASON HANSMAN: So I would, I would say
22 that certainly taking it to 11 would increase the
23 diversity on, on the committee. I would, or on the
24 council, I, or in the board. I would also say that
25 student veterans are not represented and I think

1
2 it's a tough group to have represented since you
3 know some of them are only here for a short period
4 of time. But having them and their involvement gets
5 you know this younger generation involved and I
6 think it's probably what, what I see as the most
7 underrepresented group.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well that, I think,
9 I think that's a very good idea. I think working
10 with CUNY certainly. Maybe they could help us
11 identify someone if that were to be recommendation.
12 So I just curious to see in, in your interactions
13 with the VAB how do you think they might be able to
14 do a better job? So this is not a firing squad.
15 It's not a, a session where we beat him up, beat up
16 on them. They do a great job, they're great folks,
17 and we want to help them. We want to be there with
18 them. so I want to thank you for your testimony.
19 We're going to move onto the next panel unless
20 Council Member Vallone... anything you want...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I just, again
22 thank you in enlightening us and I think what, the
23 chair and I are, and the rest of the committee are
24 going through is a learning process also. And I
25 think some of the stuff you'd assume would be

1
2 happening. And it's a little discouraging to know
3 it's not happening but I think it's not end of the
4 world, couldn't be done. It's not like there's any
5 reason or, or testimony... saying it's not going to
6 happen. I think it's just a matter of putting... I
7 wish I had group like you assisting us so it's,
8 have committees like that and have you to have
9 their back and to spread the same word it's just a
10 matter of putting... together so... I think that can be
11 pretty easily done with as little government
12 interference as possible. I think we should
13 probably do that and get the groups that are
14 actually providing the work and the services out
15 there as soon as possible. Thank you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright. Thank you
18 for your testimony. We'll call up the next panel.
19 Audrey Carr Legal Services NYC and we have Gunlocko
20 [sic], Duran, Gonzalez I'm sorry. Now we know
21 you're a service member because you put your last
22 name before your first name so... And you are
23 representing yourself and Devil Dog USA. Why don't
24 we start with Audrey and then we'll go to Mr.
25

Gonzalez but first we'll have the Committee Council swear in the panel.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL: Raise your right hand please. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to council member questions?

GONZOLO DURAN: I do.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay let's start with Audrey.

AUDREY CARR: Sorry. Good afternoon. My name is Audrey Carr. I am the Director of the Veterans Justice Project at Legal Services NYC. The Veterans Justice Project provides legal representation to low income veterans and their families who are seeking housing, employment, public benefits, and help with other crucial needs who work closely with social and mental health organizations serving veterans. And our citywide telephone hotline allows veterans to contact our offices in every borough. We are delighted that the veterans Affairs Committee is holding this hearing on the Veterans Advisory Board. As we testified at this committee's September 29th hearing on the

creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs we fully support this committee's and the council's efforts to strengthen and fortify the support provided by the city to his veterans. Given the complexity of the city's bureaucracy a homeless or an unemployed veteran often faces challenges when dealing with city agencies that do not properly enforce laws that benefit veterans. Even with existing laws that give veterans an advantage veterans sometimes must seek legal help to redress legal wrongs and barriers to their advancement. As we have previously testified before this committee our project has successfully litigated against the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs to ensure that all disabled veterans regardless of whether they are, have mental or physical disabilities are afforded the same opportunity to obtain special vending, veterans vending licenses so they can earn a living. And we have represented several veterans who were denied apartments in Mitchel Lama [sp?] housing developments despite the fact that the law provides a preference to veterans for such housing. Moving the Veterans Advisory Board out of the Mayor's Office will allow the

board to play a much more significant and effective role by ensuring that city agencies enforce and abide by all laws and regulations that benefit the veteran community. The board can and should require that city agencies provide quarterly reports to MOVA on the number of veterans they assist. For example HPD should be able to demonstrate how many veterans they have housed in Michel Lama [sp?]. DCA should report on how many veterans were granted vending licenses. The New York City Housing Authority should report on their participation in the HUD, section eight housing program which has contributed greatly to reducing veterans homelessness. And HRA should report on how many veterans it served through the special veterans job center by providing both ongoing public assistance benefits and by reporting how many one shot deals it has granted to veterans to prevent their eviction. Providing such data to the board will give the city a better view of its efforts to assist veterans returning to civilian life. As a provider of legal services to veterans we welcome every opportunity to work with the Veterans Advisory Board, the Mayor's Office of Veterans

Affairs, the City Council, and hopefully soon a New York City Department of Veterans Affairs. All of us must ensure that veterans who come home to New York City are afforded every opportunity to prosper. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Audrey. We're going to hear from Mr. Gonzalez and then we'll come back for questions.

GONZOLO DURAN: Thank you. For the record it's Gonzalo Duran... Mr. Chairman. Earlier what was mentioned was that the V, VAB doesn't have enough recognition. Well as service, Veteran Service Advisor, organizations I believe it's our job as executives to bring that information out directly to our clients. If we told all the, our clients you know who the VAB were then they would be flooded with an enormous amount of workload that they obviously can't handle at the moment. So as executives for these organizations we have to compile that and give them to the A, the VAB directly. Now I can't speak for the, the chairman but from my borough in the Bronx Pat Divine [sp?] I know where he is. I know his number. I know how to reach him. And that's my job to reach out to him.

1 For the other organizations at the state and, and
2 the borough level Leroy Archibald that's my job to
3 get to know who they are and give them the
4 information. One of the main focuses I believe
5 that, that hurts the, the, the VAB is their, their
6 power. If we brought all those clients to them a
7 lot of the services that they need are state or
8 federal level which they can't handle. They can
9 only report to the city and MOVA. As well as some,
10 some issues that were brought to me by my
11 representatives from the Bronx were that their,
12 their position is too vague. So having a, a more
13 detailed description of what they're supposed to do
14 I believe would help tremendously. And then the,
15 the last part is the, regarding the, the power
16 which is too much the, the role for the, the VAB
17 once again is limited. In the last committee for
18 the veterans committee it was brought up the VA
19 claim. And unfortunately the chairman brought that
20 up as well which I would have preferred not to
21 hear. MOVA receive 250 thousand dollars last year
22 from the Robin Hood Foundation. If you take away. I
23 don't know if anybody's actually... I don't, I
24 apologize I don't know the, the history of the, the

council members or the backgrounds but the VA claim is only 10 pages, the disability claim. There's only 10 pages. Four pages which is instructions on how to do it so it's only really six pages. Why 250 thousand dollars needed for those six pages I, I don't understand. If you take away 15 thousand dollars for training, and that's a lot of money for training on six pages, five thousand for software and, and electricity, and if you paid three counsellors the remainder I mean you're talking about 76 thousand dollars which I don't think they were paid at all. But one, where did the money go and if every, everything's established already why does 250 thousand dollars need to be given. And then what Audrey brought up was the housing issue. While once again if I brought my clients to the VAB how do I tell them, or student veterans of mine, or category to go to some programs like HUD-VASH. Well HUD-VASH one of the criterias to be eligible for HUD-VASH is one year of supervised homelessness. For someone going to afford a university NYU Columbia that's not something that we're looking for. Once again that's at the federal level. That's, there's nothing the, the, the VAB can do.

1 But obviously coming together, meetings like this
2 and, and more public speaking regarding the issue
3 we can bring it up to the city, state, and then
4 federal government. Well I, lastly I'll like to
5 leave with saying that... I like to leave with
6 solutions rather than just saying stuff to, for the
7 committee, for the VAB, or for the borough, the
8 Bronx portion I'd be happy to... [bell chimes] I'm
9 sorry.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Continue... [cross-
12 talk]

13 GONZOLO DURAN: I'll, I'll be happy to
14 provide my, my office, my resources to assist any
15 way I can. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Did you want add
17 anything else. So, I don't want to cut you short.

18 GONZOLO DURAN: No, no that's fine.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay alright. Thank
20 you very much for your testimony. And I apologize
21 for mispronouncing your name. It's Gozolo, Gonzolo..
22 [cross-talk]

23 GONZOLO DURAN: Yes, yes Mr. Chairman.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay.

25 GONZOLO DURAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I couldn't tell.

I'm sorry. Alright. I, I have a few questions that I will defer to see if, if Council Member Vallone or any of my colleagues return. I'd like to know Audrey for instance how legal services NYC has worked with the VAB in the past. What, what have been your experiences with the Veterans Advisory Board.

AUDREY CARR: We actually have not worked with the Veterans Advisory Board. I mean what we do do is that every quarter we have a veterans legal taskforce where we invite everyone in the city that works with veterans whether they be legal service providers, social service providers, mental health providers, the city council, anyone working the city to come and to discuss issues that are affecting the veteran population. So over the last few months we had trainings on the immigration and what's available to veterans who may want to naturalize and what other types of immigrations benefits are available to veterans and their family members. We've had training for the community on the GI bill. We've also had training on the HUD-VASH and housing

1 issues because we found that a lot of people run
2 into veterans who come to their organizations who
3 have a variety of legal problems and there's some
4 questions that if you got a little bit of training
5 on they'd be able to answer on their own and their
6 other little complex legal questions that they
7 could forward to legal services organizations such
8 as us.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Do you think that
11 legal services and other groups that help veterans
12 that do receive funding from other state or city
13 agency or means could help with the annual report
14 that they're supposed to publish? Because the city
15 is requiring them to put out this report which is
16 very vague. We don't really give them a lot of
17 direction as to what we're looking for in that
18 report. But in terms of reporting on some of the
19 metrics and the data and the statistics and also
20 some of the policy recommendations maybe you know
21 groups like yours could lend their expertise you
22 know to help them.

23 AUDREY CARR: Absolutely. I... [cross-
24 talk]

25 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

AUDREY CARR: ...mean we'd be happy to do that. Every legal services organizations has a case management system where we collect data because we get funding from various sources and we have to report back you know how many cases we've done, how many veterans we've served for example. And so that can easily be done. And to help the board to, to draft their reports, to give them expertise, give them ideas of what they should be looking at, where they should be going to demand information from the city to get you know information back to the council on, on what they've been doing.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right. Well that, that's, that's very important. I know that, I'm sure they'd appreciate that. Council Member Vallone do you have any questions before I move on to the final panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Real quick. Or so the information you just mentioned about the case management and the type of cases you work with for the veterans have, is that released on a quarterly or annual basis? I'd like to...

AUDREY CARR: Well actually I mean it's an internal system that we have but we draw from

1
2 that so when we are producing reports to our
3 funders for example that's where get the
4 information. But if...

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Have you seen
6 the numbers growing, of the demand growing?

7 AUDREY CARR: Absolutely. When we first
8 started our project we, in the first year we
9 probably served 300 veterans renown over 15
10 hundred. So, and we are in the third year of the
11 project. And we keep seeing you know more and more
12 veterans calling us, looking for help. A lot of the
13 help of course is, is, is legal help. But it, it
14 impact sort of like what the city is doing because
15 unfortunately even though every city agency has a
16 veteran, veteran liaison still you know veterans
17 are being denied housing, still they're being
18 denied public benefits. And so there needs to be
19 some type of transparency. And I think the board
20 would, would really be great if they got
21 information from every city agency that was
22 steeling with veterans and then they could come
23 back to, to you and say this is what HRA's told us
24 they've been doing. This is what DCA has told us
25 they've been doing. And so we have a better sense

of how we're all trying to help veterans in the city because I think right now we're really disjointed. And there's no clarity what everybody is doing. And like some of the previous panel members stated everybody wants to help veterans. I mean we all are committed to assisting every service member that's returning. But we've got it, I mean there's ways of doing it better and, and we should be, all be able to collaborate so that we can have a clear picture of where there are needs and where there are successes.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you very much that was very helpful.

AUDREY CARR: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Thank you very much for your testimony. And just as a little commercial, public service announcement, I know it came up previously but, the next veterans committee hearing... we have one more panelist but it came up in Audrey's testimony... next November 10th is the next Veterans Committee hearing at 1:00. And that will examine the city's, what the city is doing to address veterans homelessness. And on the note of procurement and vending licenses and everything

1
2 else which seems to come up at every hearing we're
3 going to have a, a hearing on Monday, December 15th
4 at 1:00 p.m. All of this is online as well as at
5 City Hall in the committee room because that is
6 when SBS is going to release the study on the
7 citywide need for veteran set aside in the
8 contracting process. So that is the focus of
9 December's hearing. This month was VAB. Next month
10 is homelessness. December 15th at 1:00 p.m. we'll
11 be talking about the procurement study, the review,
12 and the next step. So we are now going to hear from
13 our final panelist. There's only one. We saved the
14 best for last Joe Bello. Is Joe here? Alright Joe's
15 in the back. Committee Council Eric Bernstein will
16 administer the oath.

17 COMMITTEE COUNCIL: Raise your right
18 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
19 truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony
20 before this committee and to respond honestly to
21 council member questions?

22 JOE BELLO: I do.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Please proceed.

24 JOE BELLO: Okay thank you. My name is
25 Joe Bello and I am an advocate here in New York

City. Just by way of information the Local Law 45 in 2002 that was signed by Mayor Bloomberg I helped Councilman Mike Nelson of Brooklyn put that together. So that was our work together in expanding that board from five members to nine. The nine members of the city's Veterans Advisory Board are charged with advising the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs on all matters concerning veterans as well as helping to set policy that aids veterans. In 2006 the city council passed and Mayor Bloomberg signed into law Intro 0233-A. This law was aimed at strengthening the role of the board by mandating them to meet at least four times a year submitting an annual report of activities to the mayor and the council and allow for the removal of members for cause if they were not performing their duties. However with these changes the Veterans Advisory Board has been problematic at best. With no organized or public schedule of meetings, no transparent communication with the community they are supposed to represent, and a lack of coordination between both the community and the administration even though it's fairly new. There has been no real measure of accountability in how

1 and when the board meets with the community in
2 their respective boroughs, who they report to with
3 issues, how those issues make it up the city's
4 chain of command, or even how the public can get,
5 give input into the board. The lack of any
6 published minutes up until March or April of this
7 year online contributes to the problem. And another
8 issue is the current terms of the appointments of
9 the members. Because of the odd number of years in
10 appointments there has been a continued
11 reappointment of the same individuals from, for
12 years and that is primarily a previous
13 administration and previous speaker problem with
14 changes only coming when someone resigns from the
15 board. And the problem with that is since no one
16 knows when the board meets no one knows, there's no
17 notice of any openings to the board therefore the
18 selections are made how? Changes... this is also
19 contributed to the board becoming stagnant and I
20 say that primarily because of the previous
21 administration and becoming somewhat of just resume
22 filler. I asked that the, the next speaker along
23 with the next mayor receive input from the new
24 commissioner and work together to ensure that the
25

board is revamped that it is in compliance with New York state's open meeting laws. And it follows through on its duties as defined in the city charter to advocate in the best interest of the city's veterans community. That's all I wanted to say right now.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Are you sure.

JOE BELLO: Well if you have any questions... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I do.

JOE BELLO: ...there.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I do. Of course I... you think I'm letting you off that easy? I'm...

JOE BELLO: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...just kidding. So I, I think you bring up a lot of good points. I think that as I suggested earlier there's certain, we can always do better, I can always do better, the mayor can always do better, we can always do better when it comes to helping veterans. I do think that some of the changes that we talked about or some of the ideas that were proposed today. Do you think that they should be codified into law? Do you think that there's a way that we can pass a

1
2 law, craft a law that would require or force the
3 issues to be addressed or do you think that some of
4 them could be addressed on their own? I mean just
5 from your experience.

6 JOE BELLO: Well I think some of them
7 can be addressed on their own. I think the problem
8 becomes if we, if we start over legislating...

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

10 JOE BELLO: ...the board then it has this,
11 this straight and then they just going to do what's
12 supposed to be legislated. The problem though on
13 the flip side of that coin is that they've been
14 legislated to do certain things that they haven't
15 done in a number of years. So we, we have to find a
16 balance here. I mean Mr. McGowan and Mr. Covino
17 have been on the board since May 23rd of 2002. He
18 became the chair in 2008. We're now in 2014. What's
19 going on?

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah. Do you think
21 that funding is an issue. I asked the previous
22 panel that question, do you... [cross-talk]

23 JOE BELLO: No.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...think that's an
25 obstacle?

JOE BELLO: No. [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You don't.

JOE BELLO: I've served on the metropolitan hospital community advisory board. There was no funding there.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: RIGHT.

JOE BELLO: And I serve on Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz's Veterans Advisory Council and there's no funding there. If you want to do this it's because you have the passion to do it and you want to help the community that you're in. I'm not sure what funding, what would be used for.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: What, what groups do you think are not represented on the board, we're talking about representative bureaucracy. Do you think that there are any specific groups; ethnic, religious, age, sexual orientation, whatever it may be? What, what do you think of some of the groups that, that are not represented at the board? Have you ever been to a board meeting?

JOE BELLO: No.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You've never been...

JOE BELLO: No there's never been any public notice of such... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright.

JOE BELLO: ...meeting.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But... [cross-talk]

JOE BELLO: And Community board... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...based on your knowledge of the board and who the members are do you think that by adding adding additional members what group should we look to and incorporate or be, represent, make sure that they're represented on the board.

JOE BELLO: Well for me I would agree with Mr. Hansman that we need to have some of the younger vets on the board. But having looking at the board right now I also see we don't have any Gulf War vets, one. We have a, it looks like we have about one. So I'd like to see some more Gulf War vets as they, as the Vietnam vets are starting to pass away at a, at a faster rate the Gulf War vets are starting to.. and I'm not trying to push you out John...

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Sorry John.

JOE BELLO: ...I'm just making a point of saying that we should have a little bit more..

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Just in case you know.

JOE BELLO: We should have a little more Gulf War one representation.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright fair enough. Do you think that... another question down earlier I didn't get a chance to, to ask. What, what activities if, and initiatives events, what do you think that the board should take an active role in?

JOE BELLO: Well you know it, it's, it's kind of strange because the way... going back to 2002 the way Councilman Nelson at the time and I had, had discussed this and I remember having this discussion with Lee Covino the thought was, was that the members who live in their boroughs, their respective boroughs were leaders in the boroughs, in their communities. So they would kind of fill, get the sense of what was going on in the veterans community and filter that up to the commissioner. And kind of that would go up the administration and the administration would either take action or it would come back down and you know the committee would kind of, the board would kind of put

1 something together and do it that way. A lot of the
2 things that I've seen that the VAB has recommended
3 or has done since 2002 there's been a lot of things
4 that a lot of us have been involved as well. So you
5 know I'm not too sure. I think that they definitely
6 need to advise the commissioner. I just think that
7 it, there has to be a better way to get community
8 input, input. Your town hall meeting being one. But
9 I think again they have to meet within the
10 boroughs. I've lived in Manhattan for 17 years and
11 during the years from 2002 to 2000 last year we
12 never had any kind of meeting with our borough
13 representatives so hints if there was kind of a
14 local issue as Mr. Duran was bringing up then that
15 never got addressed.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right. If you had
18 to categorize or, or prioritize some of the
19 recommendations that you and, and some of the other
20 folks suggested today what do you think would be
21 the top three ways we can really improve VAB? What
22 do you think like three... if you had to... Put them in
23 no particular order but just say, give us three
24 ideas, main ideas. What do you think we can do?

JOE BELLO: Well number one and I mean this with no disrespect but my position's been known on this, you got to clean the board. There's, there's a lot of people, lot of veterans in this community who wish to serve. I can tell you going back previously I was nominated three times to this board, never got on it. Ricky Sing [sp?] who worked for Black Vets for Social Justice was nominated to this board twice, never got on it.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So the application process, how people are appointed I think that was brought up previously too by the mayor and the speaker respectively but how people can apply for membership to, to the board.

JOE BELLO: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's an interesting... [cross-talk]

JOE BELLO: Correct because even Pat Toro [sp?] was nominated twice and then finally when they selected him he had moved to Albany.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah. Well he passed away... [cross-talk]

JOE BELLO: Mm-hmm.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: He was a good man
and a... [cross-talk]

JOE BELLO: Yes he was.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...he fought for a
lot of veterans causes and I have nothing but nice
things to say about him. But that's very
interesting. But the application process. So that's
something that may be ought to be looked at too.
What else? [cross-talk]

JOE BELLO: I think also the, the dates
need to be codified. I'm a very active advocate so
you know and the veterans community is not big
enough to where you know people talk. And so you
know that sometimes the board meets it, it does
like a month month and then it doesn't meet for
several months. And then sometimes it meets within
once a quarter. I mean I don't know the dates per
say but these are the things you start to hear and
I think that it would be really helpful if those
dates were codified as set meeting dates within
those quarters, within four quarters.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right. I mean
sometimes it's hard with religious holidays and
observances but I will say like for this committee

1 we, we want to publish and we hope to set this as a
2 precedent four or five months in advance so people
3 know the the topic, the date, the time, and the
4 location and how they can watch it or participate.
5 I think that there's a lack of coordination between
6 the VAB and other city agency. That's not their
7 fault. I think that for instance DoITT and some of
8 the other agencies could be more helpful to the
9 board and putting information online and making it
10 more transparent. They can't do it on their own.
11 They don't have access to that... [cross-talk]

12
13 JOE BELLO: And, and in truth they were
14 actually hindered in the previous administration. I
15 mean you know there were a number of battles and
16 arguments I understand from the things I was told
17 that there was representatives from city hall in
18 their meetings telling them what they can and
19 cannot do. So I mean there has to be some freedom
20 for them to get on with the jobs that they have to
21 do.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah I, I agree
23 with that. We have to maintain a level of
24 independence and that is important but sometimes
25 just for full disclosure just letting people know

when things are taking place, where they're taking place, what will be discussed, how they can follow.

JOE BELLO: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You know.

JOE BELLO: I, I would like to see the board like sort of act like a, like a community board that there's an open, there's an open minutes, there's... it goes into private session... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...funding though. That's an issue too. I mean community boards do get funding. I mean funding, money is always an issue. To print my newsletter. I mean I, I paid for that myself. I didn't get reimbursed from that. That veterans bulletin that I put out.

JOE BELLO: Mm-hmm.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So things cost money. You know printing things cost money and, and getting people to meetings or getting equipment to meetings or get, sometimes it costs money. I do think funding is definitely an issue. And maybe that's something that we should address with MOVA separately but not that they should be controlling those meetings, but maybe assisting with those

meetings. That could be particularly helpful too.
So we'll, I know Commissioner Sutton is still here
and I'm not putting her on the hook for anything
but I'm just thinking out loud. But we can always
do better. That's the point. We can always do
better and even when we do these things we'll find
other ways that we can do better. Did you want to
add anything before we wrap up?

JOE BELLO: Just that I, I agree with
the concept that Mr. McGowan put forth about have,
being in a non-voting capacity to provide
continuity but since there's been no public
discussion of that I would be against that right
now.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Non-voting in, in
terms of... [cross-talk]

JOE BELLO: ...being a one year term and a
non-voting capacity so as to provide continuity and
avoid the loss of deep institutional memory as he
testified.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah I'm, I'm not
going to medal in their internal...

1
2 JOE BELLO: Yeah, no I agree with...
3 [cross-talk] it I just would like to have seen more
4 of a public discussion about it.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right. I
6 understand. I think that every, I think we got a
7 lot of great testimony here today. I think as I
8 suggested before it can't be said enough we can
9 always do better. MOVA can do better, I can do
10 better, VAB could do better, the federal
11 government, you name it. I don't think we do enough
12 for veterans across the board in every topic and
13 every area and that's the purpose of these hearings
14 is not to expose or humiliate or embarrass any, any
15 one person or government agency.. [cross-talk]

16 JOE BELLO: No let, let me just add in
17 just to finish up the, the, you know the, the
18 gentleman they're here, these are our leaders in
19 the community. And so I mean as much as I'm an
20 advocate I look to both of them including Mr.
21 Covino [sp?] and others. So you know I expect, I
22 expect more. And I expect like to be able to help
23 them if they need and you know, and I look to them.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I, and I
25 understand your frustration but I will say that the

1 needs as you know better than anybody and the
2 veterans community very differently according to
3 age and conflicts and, and branch of service. And
4 so for instance my great grandfather is 93 who
5 served in the army. You know his medical needs and
6 his social needs and his physical needs and his
7 political needs are very different than what your
8 needs are [cross-talk]. And so we want to make sure
9 that we can address the whole gamut and be
10 representative in that. So Council Member Vallone
11 do you have any closing comments before we wrap up.
12 Alright thank you every, much for coming. Thank you
13 for your testimony. And that concludes today's
14 hearing.
15

16 [gavel]
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date October 30, 2014