

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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November 12, 2015
Start: 1:38 p.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.
14th Fl

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

PAUL VALLONE
Acting Chairperson

STEPHEN T. LEVIN
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Fernando Cabrera
Andrew Cohen
Alan N. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone
Annabel Palma
Ruben Wills
Donovan J. Richards
Vanessa L. Gibson
Corey D. Johnson
Carlos Menchaca
Ritchie J. Torres

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

Loree Sutton, Commissioner
Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs (MOVA)

Gilbert Taylor, Commissioner
Department of Homeless Services (DHS)

Nicole Branca, Assistant Commissioner
Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives
Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs (MOVA)

Dr. Benjamin Charvat
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Kristen Rouse
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Peter Kempner, Director
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Legal Services NYC's Brooklyn Programs

Gary Bernstein, Chief Program Officer
Jericho Project

Craig Karawana (sp?)
America Works

Dr. David Stiffler, Psychiatrist
Steven and Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic
NYU Langone Medical Center

Latasha Peeler
Former Homeless Veteran

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

4

[Sound check, pause]

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: All right. Welcome everyone. [gavel] There we go. Good afternoon. I'm clearly not Chair Ulrich at the moment, but I'm trying to give Eric a little step up into the department today, give him a little help. But he will be here. So I'm going to step in and co-chair with Council Member Levin on this committee, and I think it's a great day. I think we're still glowing after yesterday. I think like we said Veterans Day is everyday. It's just not when we march. So to see what we accomplished together in creating our new city agency I tell you I had a smile on all day yesterday, and it was great explaining it to the children at the schools and the chair with the parade yesterday. Well done, and everyone that marched, and everyone who couldn't march who sent their support it was something more exciting than usual yesterday. And Commissioner I know you felt it. You're smiling and nodding your head, and still smiling. So what we've done is create something now for forever, and that's pretty exciting. But today we're here, and we're going to--I'm going to read Chair Ulrich's statement today.

Today is the day after Veteran's day, and a week in which we could come together to honor the men and women who have served our country, New York City's veterans and their families have much to celebrate. On Tuesday, the Council took an historic step and voted to establish a full Department of Veteran Services. However, this is just the beginning. There is still a lot work remaining to deliver our veterans the resources they deserve. One of the biggest challenges we face is ending veteran homelessness both here, in New York City and around the country. The city took a critical step when Mayor de Blasio signed onto the Obama Administration's, the Mayor's Challenge to end veterans homelessness pledging that New York City would eliminate homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015. In his State of the City speech this year, the Mayor declared: We commit to ending chronic homelessness among veterans this year. However, we also know that homelessness in the city is at a record high. We know that our homeless including our veterans are placed too often into substandard shelters to live in shameful conditions. Today, we receive an update from MOVA and the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

6

Department of Homeless Services on the progress the city is making in achieving its goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of this year. We also expect to hear how the Administration plans to ensure that no veteran falls into a state of chronic homelessness or is forced to live in degrading conditions. No one who served and sacrificed for our nation should ever find themselves and their families without a permanent and respectable place to call home. I'd like to thank Council Members Levin, Chair of the General Welfare Committee and members of our Veterans Committee for joining us today. I'd like to thank our Veterans Committee staff Eric Bernstein, Michael Kurtz, and John Russell, as well as the staff of the General Welfare Committee Andrea Vasquez, Tonya Cyrus, Dohini Sompura for help us today putting the hearing together.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Council Member Vallone. I want to acknowledge members of the General Welfare Committee who are here with us this afternoon, Council Member Annabel Palma of the Bronx; Council Member Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx as well. Thank you both very much for joining us. Good afternoon everybody. I'm Council Member

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

7

Stephen Levin, Chair of the Council's Committee on General Welfare. Last year, the Committees on Veterans Affairs and General Welfare held a similar joint hearing on the City's efforts to end homelessness among veterans. Once again, I am pleased to join Council Member Eric Ulrich who will be here shortly, Chair of the Veterans Committee, on this important topic. I want to thank Chair Vallone. I want to thank everybody who has come today to testify, especially veterans. Although we spent yesterday celebrating and acknowledging the contributions of our veterans, we know that homelessness among our veterans is still a challenge that our city and our nation must overcome. And today, we are here to discuss the city's progress on ending veterans homelessness, and to learn whether the city is on track to achieve this goal by December 31st, 2015, which is only seven weeks away from today.

At last year's hearing, we were informed that there were about 1,300 homeless veterans here in New York City, a 64% decline from 2011. Today, the committees are interesting in learning where we are today. How many veterans are living in DHS shelters?

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

8

How many veterans are living on the streets? What is the plan to secure permanent housing for those remaining individuals. I'm also interested in learning what steps the de Blasio Administration has taken to ensure that every veteran in New York City is placed into permanent housing, that--and that supportive services are available especially to those who are suffering from disability, PTSD and other mental health issues. I am very appreciative of the Administration's hard work, and I now welcome testimony from General Loree Sutton, Commission of for now the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, and Commissioner Gilbert Taylor, Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services. Before we begin, I will ask you to raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Council, and to respond honestly to Council Member's questions?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [off mic] I do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can everybody that's to testify make the same affirmation?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] I do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

General. [pause] Please push the microphone button.

There you go. You should have a red light. There
you go.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Good afternoon,
Chairman Levin, Acting Chairman, Council Member
Vallone, and everyone here gathered today, my fellow
Commissioner, Commissioner Taylor and members of the
Committee on Veterans and the Committee on General
Welfare. This is indeed a historic huge week for our
city and for our veterans and their families. I am
Loree Sutton, privileged to serve Commissioner of the
Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, MOVA, for now,
and yes I am joined today by my colleague, Nicole
Branca, Assistant Commissioner and Senior Advisor for
Strategic Initiatives at MOVA. The Mayor's Office of
Veteran's Affairs is excited to be entering a new era
in our city's history as we prepare to transition
from our current organization within the Mayor's
Office to become a separate agency as the Department
of Veterans Services. MOVA was first established by
Local Law 53 in 1987 to work on behalf of New York
City veterans and their families to advise the Mayor
on issues and initiatives impacting the veteran and
military community. As a department, we will
continue our work with respect to the Mayor and his

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

10

Administration with the capabilities that reflect the scale of our mission to serve the needs of over 230,000 veterans and their families. I appreciate this clear demonstration of support and confidence from both the speaker and the Mayor as well as the City Council and the veteran advocate community. In particular Chairman Ulrich who will soon be here, and he shared with us his comments. I have told him already in person, and I will repeat it again today: I thank Chairman Ulrich so much as well as for members of the Committee on Veterans and the Committee on General Welfare for your stalwart support and leadership on behalf of those whom we are privileged to serve.

Chairman Levin, as you recall when we met together about a year ago or a little over a year ago now, we were at a different place, and so I'm very proud now to be sharing those with you, and your committee members as well as with the Committee on Veterans just where we are today. Also, of course, flanked by my buddy here, Commissioner Gilbert Taylor from the Department of Homeless Services. And, of course, it's not just Commissioner Taylor and his department of Homeless Services, but it's also our

sister agencies across city government and across the city who have partnered in unprecedented ways to end veteran homelessness.

By way of background, in June of 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama announced the Mayor's Challenge to end veteran homelessness. In response to the federal Mayor's Challenge, the New York City Continuum of Care formed a veterans taskforce bringing together multiple city agencies with veteran focused non-profits and launched Mission Home a city-based initiative to end veteran homelessness. In the 2015 State of the City Address Mayor Bill de Blasio elevated this initiatives to an administration priority by joining the over 570 mayors, governors and local officials across the country committed to ending veteran homelessness in 2015. This made the city's commitment to Mission Home official and put New York City in the running to be the largest city in the country to meet this ambitious bold goal. To date, only a small number of cities across the country have met the goal of ending veteran homelessness this year including New Orleans, Phoenix and Salt Lake City. To date, Houston, a city of two million, is the largest city to achieve this goal.

The federal standard for ending veteran homelessness is based on reaching and maintaining Functional Zero. We acknowledge that there's always going to be new people, new veterans entering the system as we house all of the exiting individuals who are homeless. At Functional Zero, a community has the resources, plans and capacity to swiftly, to rapidly identify and place any veteran who become homeless. On average approximately 100 veterans become homeless each month in New York City. The city has committed to placing all newly homeless veterans into permanent housing within 90 days or less, which meets the federal standard for quote "swiftly placing veterans into permanent housing."

With approximately 100 veterans entering the system each month in New York and an average period from the identification of a veteran entering the system, to achieving permanent housing placement, 90 days meets the Functional Zero requirement in New York City and 300 homeless veterans represents the maximum number of veterans that we anticipate having in our system at any given time. The current status: When Mayor de Blasio first took office in January of 2014, there were over 1,600 homeless men and women

who server our country in our shelters or on our city streets. We have since reduced this number by more than 50% and our street homeless count today is only eight veterans. As of today, 93% of our veterans have a rental subsidy in hand or are in the process of getting one. As we sit here today, over 300 veterans are in the process of moving into their own apartment. This is good news indeed. The remainder of my testimony today is about the creative new strategies, and initiatives that we have developed during this past year to accelerate our rate of housing homeless veterans. To meet our commitment, the city has harnessed the extensive resources provided by the federal government. However, New York City faces a unique challenge in housing homeless veterans due to the less than one percent vacancy rate for low-income households seeking apartments in this city. Thus, the city has added considerably more city resources in the form of local rental subsidies, landlord and broker incentives and new and redirected staffing at all of the agencies in the city that touch housing or homeless services to identify apartments and place veterans in an expeditious manner supported through their peer-to-

per relationships. My colleague, Commissioner Taylor, will provide you with extensive details on these new programs and incentives, and I will now discuss with you the various systems changes and human resources that we have brought to bear of these past few months as well as the details on the city's campaign to identify enough permanent housing to house all of our veterans. Both the Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs and the Department of Homeless Services have brought on new staff dedicated exclusively to this initiative. The impetus for this staffing was rooted in the fact that the vast majority of the city's homeless veterans had some form of rental subsidy, but few had anyone to help them with the actual process of finding, visiting and following up with landlords for apartments.

Our assessment identified a pressing need for affordable housing and operations experts to run point on this effort as well as a team of veterans to work peer-to-peer with their fellow veterans in shelter. To fill the gap in direct housing placement assistance for homeless veterans, MOVA has hired five Veteran Peer Coordinators who are each assigned to one of the primary veteran shelter sites, and who

attend weekly meetings with case managers and social workers who work with these clients, the veterans within their respective sites. DHS has triaged all veterans to a smaller number of shelters so that we could better serve them, and each week our staff identifies a new list of veterans at the shelters who are ready to move, and who would most benefit from having a veterans peer coordinator assigned to them. Our Veteran Peer Coordinators establish these essential peer-to-peer bonds with our homeless veterans and accompany them in close coordination with case workers, housing specialists and service providers to expedite placement, prevent recidivism, building resiliency and sustain the gains through coordinated after care and follow-up services.

The Veteran Peer Coordinator team provides us veterans with guidance on how to prepare for the interview, focus on priority options, and peer support to lock in an appropriate housing option. Veteran Peer Coordinators attend every apartment viewing with the veteran, and work with the appropriate agencies to expedite their housing placement. This peer-to-peer model ensures that each veteran is placed in housing appropriate to their

needs and helps give our homeless veterans the support needed to safely and comfortably transition into permanent housing. To date, our Veteran Peer Coordinators have linked veterans to over 60 apartments. MOVA is also working hand-in-hand with the Department of Homeless Services and our sister agencies on a day-to-day basis to place veterans in housing. We have formal meetings weekly between the senior staff from MOVA and DHS along with our colleagues at City Hall. And Commissioner Taylor and I also meet with the Mayor weekly to brief him on our progress to achieve the goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. MOVA and DHS have instituted clear policies to hold all governmental and external stakeholders accountable. We now have a point person at each city agency who is involved in the process of housing a veteran who is available to address any and all questions or difficulties pertaining to individual cases and processes. For the first time ever, City Hall has instituted weekly interagency meetings to address red tape and clear any process barriers in the way of housing each homeless veteran. This meeting is followed by a weekly Mayor's briefing focused specifically on

ending veteran homelessness. In addition to our work with our sister agencies, MOVA is and DHS are actively managing a database of all known homeless veterans. Working with our VA partners to ensure that all veterans in the system are known to us and are being prioritized for services and housing resources. Our providers now report weekly for all DHS and VA funded shelters to track targets towards our overall goal. This work ensures that we account for every veteran in the system, and hold ourselves and our federal partners to our goals. With this database, we are able to individually reach out to every homeless veteran and veteran living on the street by name, offer them a permanent housing intervention, and conduct regular outreach to connect these veterans to housing. With this targeted outreach since the Mayor took office, the number of homeless--the number of homeless veterans living on the streets has dropped by 97% from 39 street homeless veterans to eight veterans. Correction. Has dropped by 97% from 329 to eight veterans.

Through increased intergovernmental accountability, we have been able to streamline the process for getting veterans into an apartment. In

the past, landlords would often wait six to eight weeks for their leasing paperwork to be approved and apartments to be inspected. Agencies have now committed to expediting each process step for apartments linked to our veterans within 24 to 48 hours of receipt. Further, even when a veteran was linked to an apartment and ready for leasing signing, they would often have to wait to be housed because their signing had not yet be scheduled. HRA has committed to scheduling all leas signings within 24 hours. The agencies now share weekly reports of bottlenecks in specific veterans cases, and work immediately to address these delays. From apartment identification to move in, we have identified numerous points where we can reduce the turnaround time and streamline the process of placing veterans in apartments. In New York City one of the biggest obstacles we face in housing homeless veterans is housing supply. In addition to the general lack of affordable housing and record low vacancy rates in the city, we face the additional challenge of needing almost exclusively apartments for singles. To that end, MOVA is working aggressively to identify increased housing supply options in both the public

and private sectors. The very first course of action for the new MOVA team was to develop and implement a housing supply plan that garners not only enough housing but a cross-section of housing to meet the varying needs of our homeless veterans. To this end, we are working with DHS and HRA to ensure that veterans with higher service needs get referred into supportive housing or receive VASH, the federal Section 8 program that is specific to veterans and provides them with case managers at their local VA. For all other veterans we are working hand-in-hand with HPD, HDC and NYCHA to identify vacancies and new lease-ups for veterans and their families.

MOVA is also working directly with the affordable housing sector asking for a commitment of at 200 units by years end. We are offering a single point of access for any affordable housing provider who commits a unit for a homeless veteran, and we will reach out to schedule a viewing within 48 hours of the referral. The response has been overwhelming with nearly half of these units already committed. In addition to the work we are doing to increase the housing supply through public sector units, the Mayor's Office has created a team focused on working

with small landlords. The Landlord Outreach Team
their members are dedicated to proactively and
relentlessly identifying and recruiting landlords to
commit their vacancies to house homeless veterans.
And are prioritizing veterans and veteran families
for all apartments. Once this team gets a commitment
from a landlord, they loop back with MOVA and the DH
shelters to schedule an apartment viewing usually
within 48 hours. This small but dedicated team is
committed to finding up to 300 apartments for our
homeless veterans.

In conclusion, as you can tell from this
testimony, our collective testimony today, this is an
all hands-on deck campaign to fulfill our moral
obligation of serving those who have served us.
Commissioner Taylor and I proudly sit before you
today sharing our actions. However, we would not be
at the doorstep of ending veteran homelessness
without the various financial human systems and
housing stock commitments by our many partners.
These include the Continuum of Care; the Veteran Task
Force on Ending Veteran Homelessness; HRAM
Commissioner Banks; HPD, Commissioner Bean; NYCHA,
Commissioner Olaytoye. The tremendous financial

support and partnership with the VA and HUD. And the
outpouring of assistance by the service providers,
affordable housing developers, and staunch stalwart
veteran and housing advocates who are working with us
around the clock to make this goal reality. Thank
you so much for this opportunity to testify today.
Following Commissioner Taylor's testimony, we look
forward to your questions, ideas, concerns and
suggestions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: Thank you, General.
We've been joined by other members of our Veterans
Committee. Joining us already is Francisco Cabrera
and Council Members Annabel Palma, and now we've been
joined by Council Member Alan Maisel, Council Member
Andrew Cohen. I also have other council member Corey
Johnson and Donovan Richards that are here with us,
and I know Council Member Cabrera has some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABREAR: Ruben Wills.

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: Ruben Wills. Yes,
I saw him pop him. There you are. I told you
weren't going to get acknowledging. I'll make you
sit down before you get that. (laughs) All right,
Council Member Cabrera, do you have some questions.

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

22

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Oh, we can hear
from Commissioner Taylor.

CHAIRPERSON VALLONE: Oh, Commissioner
Taylor, please. I apologize.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Good afternoon. So
my name is Gilbert Taylor. I'm the Commissioner of
the Department of Homeless Services. I want to thank
the Committee on General Welfare and the Committee on
Veterans for taking our testimony today, and
recognize the continued support of Chairman Levin as
well as Chairman Ulrich and Acting Chairman Vallone
in terms of the work that we're doing related to
ending veteran's homelessness. I'm happy to be here
with my colleague Kenneth and Loree Sutton. I'm also
happy to be able to offer testimony today with my
colleague, Dr. Benjamin Charvat, Deputy Commissioner
for Policy and Planning at DHS as well as Nicole
Branca from MOVA as well. So thank you for the
opportunity to present testimony regarding the City's
efforts to end veterans homelessness. I'm extremely
proud of the work that the city is doing to support
veterans who have been touched by our system.
Veterans are men and women who have made a conscious
choice to put the needs of our country above all

else. There are more than 200,000 veterans living in New York City, and we owe them our deepest gratitude. They do so much and ask for so little in return. At the very least ensuring that they are securely housed should be our nation's obligation to them, and the City is doing its part. In fact, I'm proud to say that since January of 2014, we have reduced the veteran street homeless population to eight, which was also referenced by my colleague. On March 28 of 2014, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs launched the 25 Cities Initiative to end veterans homelessness by end of 2015. The initiative was designed to help communities with high concentrations of homeless veterans intensify and integrate their local efforts. New York City under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio signed on immediately, and we've been working tirelessly to meet this goal through an effort entitled Mission Home. New York City is striving to end veterans' homelessness for all veterans including those on the street and in shelter. The Mission Home campaign is focused on ending veterans' homelessness and aligning outreach services and resources to ensure that New York City's veterans receive the comprehensive assistance that

they need to move into their own home. On Mission Home our mission is to ensure that every veteran has a home. Ending veterans' homelessness is a top priority for DHS and we are collaborating with the Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs, Housing Preservation and Development, New York City Housing Authority, HRA, as well as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on every step of this journey. DHS and MOVA are in daily communications strategizing on ways to reduce the number of homeless veterans in our system, discussing individual cases and organizing new ways to maximize the number of veterans that we place into permanent housing. This partnership is crucial and presents--represents the City's collaborate--collaborative effort to end veterans homelessness. One of the results of this collaboration is recognizing that the best way for the city to help veterans was to bring veterans onto our team through an evidence based model that has been successful elsewhere. Veteran Peer Coordinators provide veterans with additional individualized support and assistance in their search for permanent housing. These are veterans who have successfully been integrated into society, and want to use their

experience to help other veterans who are
experiencing hardship. They engage vets on ways in
which to best interview for housing and apartments
and jobs. They travel with them to appointments, and
advocate specifically to potential landlords on their
behalf. They receive extensive training on all of
the various housing placements that the city offers
in the ten veteran summits across the city. They
work nights and weekends and do whatever it takes to
make sure that veterans are placed. And just as
importantly, they serve as a resource after placement
to help the veteran reintegrate smoothly into their
new home and community. For veterans who need extra
clinical support, and are weary of leaving shelter,
we've hired licensed social workers that can engage
these individuals to help place them into housing
that is more appropriate for their needs. Veterans
who are experiencing homelessness, just like all
homeless New Yorkers are impacted by economic forces
that affect New York City and the economic inequality
that we see everyday in our system. Low wages, lack
of affordable housing, and the increased cost of
living combined with social traumas of domestic
violence and discord are causing many New Yorkers,

veterans included to find themselves in very difficult situations that no one should have to experience. Furthermore, in many cases veterans are burdened with the emotional scars brought on by the trauma related to combat, and even hand social services so that they can properly reintegrate into their home communities. The mental health challenges associated with this population can make it additionally challenging for them to find appropriate housing. This, we in the Administration are committed to taking this on head on, taking--tackling these issues head on, ensuring that all veterans of our city are connected to quality care services and resources, and most importantly for our purposes a home that they can call their own.

The Executive Budget for FY16 includes approximately \$150 million across more than a dozen agencies for programs and services that benefit veterans and their families with more than \$57 million for housing programs. I'm happy to announce that we have seen real results with this multiple faceted approach. Our efforts are making real differences in the lives of men and women who serve. Employing a systematic approach, in the last five

years we've been able to reduce the overall number of homeless veterans to 4,677 in 2011 to 847 to day, an 80% decrease. This decrease is even more notable when you see that since January of 20--January 1st of 2014 over 2,000 veterans have entered our shelter system. New York City differs from some of the other municipalities by having a Right to Shelter Mandate. So as we rapidly exit existing veterans by having a Right to Shelter Mandate--so as we rapidly exit existing veterans, new veterans enter the system. We are using every resource at our disposal to rapidly re-house these veterans and return them to the community, and we will ensure that even after all of our existing clients are housed, future veterans will be rapidly housed and will leave shelter within 90 days. Prevention is the cornerstone of DHS' efforts across our system. We believe that shelter should must be a last resort, and have naturally extended this principle to our work with veterans. The most effective way to end veterans homelessness is to stop it before it begins. Our Home Base Prevention Program is nationally recognized, and has been proven to be 95% effective in helping those who are enrolled in the program to remain stably housed, and remain in

their own community. In Fiscal Year 2016, DHS Prevention Services approved \$400,000 to implement homelessness prevention programs for veterans via Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council Home Base. This program is targeting 100 veterans in the community with shelter histories who are most at risk of homelessness. By creating a high-risk profile for these veterans who might re-enter the system, we can provide them with any help that they may need before their situation becomes dire. This preventive model enables them to--enables individuals to remain stably housed in their community. DHS has also approved \$500,000 to implement a rapid re-housing program to help veterans presenting for re-entry, or as new entrants into the shelter system. This new model is slightly different from our normal prevention measures as it targets veterans entering shelter with enhanced services. Rapid re-housing is a promising evidence informed and short-term practice model, and a key prevention service strategy to support ending veterans homelessness. The core practice includes housing identification, financial assistance for rent and moving costs and case management service. It is part of the city's effort to ensure that any veteran

1 who enters the system can be successfully placed into
2 permanent housing as quickly as possible. In
3 addition to prevention services, DHS is committed to
4 serving all unsheltered veterans in the city, and our
5 results with veterans in this area has been truly
6 remarkable. As I've stated, we reduced the veterans
7 street homelessness population from 329 to eight, the
8 street homeless population from 329 to eight. We
9 have achieved this success with intensive casework
10 and by closely partnering with the VA, which offers
11 coordinated medical services to individuals on the
12 street. Relationship building is the key to outreach
13 work and we are fortunate to have teams of incredibly
14 patient and compassionate individuals who are on the
15 streets everyday making connections and assisting
16 veterans who want help to move into permanent
17 housing.

18
19 One story of a veteran that I'd like to
20 share is about a gentleman named Ian. For two years
21 Ian lived on the streets of New York City. He
22 wondered how he'd be able to find a job and an
23 apartment. After connecting with an outreach worker,
24 he found comfort and support at a Safe Haven. From
25 there, with the help of the compassionate and

dedicated staff at the Safe Haven he was able to move into permanent housing. Ian's story is a great example of how outreach workers can connect with unsheltered vets--unsheltered veterans, and begin to lead them down the path to permanency. DHS' commitment is to find permanent housing for all of the 847 veterans who are currently in our system, and rapidly re-house any new veterans who may need our help. Nearly 600 veterans currently have housing vouchers in hand, and are actively seeking housing. Of those with vouchers in hand approximately 300 are linked to specific apartments, or are currently in a leasing process. We are tracking every single veteran within our system, and have housing plans assigned to them based on their individualized needs. In the past year alone, we have placed 900 veterans into permanent housing. We are committed to using every program in our arsenal to ensure that veterans exit shelter and return to the community. However, as we have seen, it takes a true partnership between the public and private sectors to find homes for all homeless--for all the homeless in our system. We are thankful to all landlords in New York City who are performing acts of patriotism by renting apartments

to veterans. To further encourage this partnership, the City has recently launched an online and print public awareness campaign recruiting New York City landlords to participate in the Mission Home Program. This additional outreach is needed as we do--as we do this work at a time when the affordable housing market has a vacancy rate of less than one percent. Even with subsidies, it is a challenge to find apartments. Not surprisingly, this is greatly limiting, and is a problem that is unique to New York. When compared to other cities where vacancy rates have far--are far more substantial. However, there are landlords who are giving back. One such landlord with whom we are successfully partnered is Christine from Staten Island. We were able to connect with Christine through the Small Landlord Campaign. Christine wanted to rent to a veteran, and was very excited when she was matched with Antonio, and she instantly knew that she wanted him as a tenant. In Christine's words Antonio was respectful, quiet and a pleasure to house. Now that Antonio is stably housed, he is working as an outreach counselor assisting other veterans. Christine has had such positive experience with Mission Home, and she is now

renting her second vacancy to another veteran. She says she feels blessed to be able to help veterans, and wants to work with us in the future, and we as a city are fortunate to have landlords such as Christine using their resources to help veterans who are in need. There are multiple ways that veterans within our system can access housing like the kind that Christine was able to offer. With the appropriate discharge stats in the military, veterans are able to access HUD VASH vouchers as well as supportive services for veteran's families. In the event that a veteran cannot access VA rental assistance programming, they have access to a variety of city rental assistance programs for homeless individuals that began in September of 2014. These programs are called Living in Communities or LINC. There are six targeted programs for rental assistance that veterans can access including offerings from Working Families, those who are chronically, veterans with a survivor or domestic violence in the household, seniors, working single adults, and single adults who may be able to rent rooms from a friend or a family member. In addition to the DHS Rental Assistance Programs, there are other rental

assistance offerings that are available to all veterans. These include City Thefts--City SEPS, NYCHA, HPD and NYCHA Section 8 Housing, Supportive Housing Units and MRT. Recognizing the unique status of veterans, DHS has implemented several incentives to support these efforts so that landlords like Christine can be appropriately compensated for their willingness to partner with the city. We've created many incentive programs to help find housing placements for veterans including a 15% broker bonus that will be paid for successfully placed veterans; cash incentives for landlords for every apartment and commercial rental(sic) with a one-year lease that's signed with a homeless veteran; and bonuses to supportive housing providers for each unit that they rent to a veteran with a voucher. In addition, all veterans who are housed received comprehensive services to Supportive Services For Veteran's Families, SSVF, to ensure that even after they are placed into permanent housing that they can still access services to keep them stably housed. And if for some reason a veteran is not eligible for SSVF services, Samaritan Village, one of our non-profit providers through a grant from the Robin Hood

Foundature--Foundation provides the same services at no cost to the participant. This means landlords like Christine will continue to work with the city and clients like Antonio can stay stably housed. This administration deeply cares about all veterans, and has made a powerful commitment to provide them with services they need including housing. DHS is working very closely with MOVA and various non-profits across the city to ensure that no veteran has to experience homelessness for any prolonged period of time. We will continue to strive a city in which veterans' homelessness is a relic of another era. Thank you, and we stand ready to take your questions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Commissioner. I have a couple of questions I'd like to start off with, and then I'll turn it over to my co-chair. So, obviously the--the number that jumps out to me is eight street homeless veterans in New York City by your count. Forgive me for being a little skeptical. Um, that's an extremely low number. I--I--I, you know, I know two homeless veterans living on the street because they're outside of this building often. So, you know, that would basically account for a quarter of the--those

1 veterans in New York City. Um, I don't--I--I mean I
2 haven't seen them in a couple of months so they might
3 have been--they might have been housed. Um, how--how
4 do you determine that count? Are those people that
5 you have an open case for? Is that that you've
6 identified as a veteran? Is this--are you--are you--
7 do you think that there are other homeless veterans
8 living out on the street that you might not know of?
9 Um, how do you arrive at that number, such a specific
10 number?
11

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Chairman Levin,
13 thanks so much for that question. There are multiple
14 veterans through which we have identified that count.
15 Some of them come from referrals from our housing
16 outreach team, some from our peer-to-peer
17 coordinators, some from the Point in Time Count. You
18 may recall that last October when we last testified
19 about the homelessness issue, I then, as this
20 question came up about accuracy of numbers went on
21 record saying if there is anyone--anyone who knows of
22 a street homeless veteran that we are not aware of,
23 please let us know and we will add him or her to the
24 list. I have repeated that many, many times over the
25 last 13 years. No one has come to me with a name.

If there is someone that you know of, I can assure you that we want to know about him or her. I will just give you an anecdote of one of our most renowned homeless veterans. Actually, today in about 40 minutes Thomas Wagner also known as Cadillac is picking up the paperwork for his new apartment in Astoria. Cadillac, a veteran, the author of A Land of Lost Souls, a story about his previous experiences living on the streets of New York, and the inspiration of Richard Gere's recent film on homelessness became homeless again, and was living on the streets of Astoria in Queens. Working hand-in-hand with SUS, HANAC, and the Supportive Housing Network we were able to find Cadillac an apartment in the neighborhood that he calls home. I cite that as one such example. We are working this street homeless list just as we are with the shelter homeless list, name by name. This is very personal. This is all about relationships. So I will say it again today: If anyone here knows of a veteran who is living on the streets of our great city, please let us know who that veteran is. And if we do not have him or her already on our list, we will add them. Thank you, Chairman Levin.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So just to add,
Street Outreach is administered is DHS by multiple
non-profit providers, and the first part of their
work is to actually get identifying information for
our clients who are on the street. Once they have
that identifying information, then they are able to
use it to cross-track veteran status. If an
individual self--self-discloses and says they're a
veteran, we take them for their word, but we also
check with VA to get a sense of whether they served.
And we've found people who have reported being
veterans who have not served in the military. We
also found people who have not disclosed their
veteran status who did serve in the military. And so
we have a fairly good gauge in terms of knowing the
veteran status of our street homeless clients. For
all intents and purposes, our street--our street
staff, our street caseworkers they are out there,
right? They know who their clients are and they're
out there everyday, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.
We have teams on--on call at all hours of the night.
They have clients who are on caseload, and they're
looking very granularly at every individual that
we're working with, and trying to get a sense of who

1 they are. And so, we feel very confident of the
2 number of eight being on our caseload who are
3 veterans who have served, and who are--are people
4 that we're seeking to bring in doors. Now, to your
5 question of are there others? I would echo the
6 Commissioner's sentiment in that if there are
7 individuals who may disclose to someone else and not
8 necessarily our street team that they're (1) what
9 their full identity is so that we can actually cross-
10 check it, and (2) that they're veterans, we would be
11 more than welcome to immediately respond and get a
12 sense of who those individuals are. But we're very
13 confident in terms of this number.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What about
16 individuals that are reluctant to--to go into the
17 shelter system. So, you know, similar to, you know,
18 the general homeless--street homeless population,
19 there are individuals who may have mental health
20 challenges or needs that might, you know, may prompt
21 them to reject outreach, and certainly not seek out
22 outreach--you know, seek out services. What's the--
23 is there a--what's the strategy for individuals that
24 fit that profile?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So we go to them,
right. We know that the drivers for street
homelessness and subway homelessness tend to be tend
to be untreated mental illness, and substance abuse
for this population and for other populations. Um,
our street homeless staff are mobile, and the
expectation is they literally everyday go out. They-
-they canvass the streets, and if they identify
people who they believe are unsheltered, they will
engage those individuals and they will ask them
questions related to their housing status and their
housing need. If a--if the person that they're
engaging is unable to communicate with them, or
unwilling to communicate with them, they go back,
right. And so they keep going back, and they will
keep going back to the extent that they can find the
individual and continue to try to engage the
individual. And so it takes quite a bit of time to
engage someone who's living on the streets to--to get
them into housing. But that continued outreach, and
that continued fortitude in terms of asking the
questions and making, and establishing really a
relationship with the individuals so that they would
trust them in giving them information is what helps

us in this core work. And so, for the population that you're referencing, it does require every resource that we currently have in our street teams, which are dedicated, very compassionate staff who are driven by wanting to reach people where they're at. And you also have a complement of mental health clinicians who work with them, who are also mobile, and who will also meet the clients where they're at. They'll go out to the location. They will interview the client, and do everything they can to try to get the clients to come in.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But are there individuals that are--that will simply refuse and that your--that your street outreach teams or the peer-to-peer or whatever--the--whatever resources we have are, you know, not enough to reach?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: There are. There are some people who are very resistant to many of the services that we provide.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that would be-- that would--they would be included in that eight? Those are those eight?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Well, these eight
are very resistant in terms of not wanting to come
in, right?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: But we know who
they are, and we're going out, and we're--we know
that if they were to tell us this second that they
wanted to come in, we have a bed for them--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: --and we have a
place in which to house them. Um, but for--that's
the broader population, this eight included, it does
require a lot of continued follow up, and a lot of
real determination.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then if you take
them through the process--so if a--if a--so there's
been several hundred now, um, individuals living on
the street, veterans living on the street that are
in--that are no longer considered homeless. So
they're not in a shelter. They're in permanent
housing. Is that correct?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Uh-huh.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So if--for an
individual that is, um, that is on the street, the--

their--the first step is that they're--they're, um,
given a bed in one of the two veteran's shelters. Is
that right, or are they going to another single adult
shelter in the system?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So, it depends upon
the case. There are street homeless individuals
including veterans who we've been able to place on
the street into supportive housing units that are
available--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Directly, not--

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing]
Directly

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: --going--not going
through the shelter system?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Correct without the
shelter system and without Safe Haven. So others who
have come in, in the Safe Haven programming that we
have, which is a harm reduction model, a shelter that
tends to be more--more appealing to clients who are
more resistant to enter shelter.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, we--we have a
waiting list for clients to actually come into our
safe haven because we don't have sufficient capacity

1 to--to match the need, but we are opening up 500 more
2 Safe Haven beds. Um, you know, anticipating the need
3 for this winter. So that will help us tremendously.
4 So it's a mix and there are some clients that we've
5 been able to engage to move right from the street
6 straight into shelter, straight to permanent housing.
7 Others who bypass that stuff at the shelter, and go
8 straight to housing. It depends upon where the
9 client is in terms of their housing readiness, and
10 also in terms of their ability to stabilize and to
11 receive the housing resources that we can provide.
12 Our perfect goal, though, would be to move a client
13 from the street to housing, and then to support them
14 with after care services so that they're housed and
15 maintaining their home.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is there--is--are the
18 two veterans shelters Board and Avenue Quarter Avenue
19 are they, um, at that full 100% capacity, or is it--
20 Say--say for instance I walk out the door today--

21 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing] Uh-
22 huh.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: --and I encounter a
24 veteran, um, who is homeless and living on the
25 street, and I say, Hey, I'm going to get you housed

1 today. Um, can they--is there a spot for them at
2 those two shelters? Is there anything?

3
4 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: There is--there is
5 absolutely a spot for them, I will--

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Okay.

7 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: --tell you
8 thankfully because of the programming that we have in
9 place right now. As we sit here and offer this
10 testimony there are veterans who are signing leases,
11 and we have veterans who are looking at apartments,
12 right. And do, when movement in the system creates
13 the vacancies that we need to accommodate new
14 veterans that we want to come off the street and come
15 inside, thankfully the number is so low--

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

17 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: --that for those
18 eight we know that we have a place identified for
19 them. Um, but yes, I can see your point. To your
20 question, we do have--um, we have the ability to
21 accommodate any veteran that would need space in our
22 system.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How about veterans
24 that are, um, lacking a permanent home that are couch
25 surfacing that don't--that aren't necessarily living

on the street, but they're not--and they're not in the shelter system but they're not--they're not, you know they're--they're kind of--I--I encountered an individual who some days who is--if it was warm enough he would sleep outside. If--if it was--you know, if he was able to find a couch to crash on, he would sleep on the couch.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Uh-huh.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, you know, is that--is that something that you would consider one of the eight street homeless or--or how would you--how would you--what profile was that individual? What category does that individual fit into.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So that individual would most likely not be on our street homeless census.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: He is not on the street and part of our caseload.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, sometimes he's on the street.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Well, if they were in our caseload, and if they were on the street and part of our caseload, then that might be so. But for

those individuals for that population that you're describing there's another resource that I would welcome, um, that I would offer and that would actually be Home Base. So it would actually be our prevention measures because anyone who has an ability to stay stably housed, um, if it's a housing situation that's safe, if it's a housing situation that can be maintained, we will support that individual to keep that situation.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm not necessarily talking about individuals that--that can--that the situation can be maintained. If they're crashing on somebody's couch, obviously that's a temporary-- that's a temporary situation that I don't imagine that anyone has like an open-ended commitment.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: But there might be an opportunity for us to work with that individual to--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: --best track them to housing placement to the extent that one can be identified as opposed to having that individual have to make the stop into shelter. So again, it's really a question of do you have a bed for the night? And,

1
2 if we do, then we can use all of the resources that
3 we have in place to try to make you sure that we can
4 move you from a bed to a more permanent housing
5 situation.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, I'm going to turn
7 it over to my colleague, but I'll be coming back for
8 more questions. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Chairman
10 Levin, and I want to apologize for being late. I had
11 a meeting upstairs, and I want to thank Council
12 Member Vallone for stepping in temporarily as the
13 interim chair. So we want to be more careful about
14 these terms. Anyway, you know, what, why don't we
15 let some of the members--because I know there are two
16 other committees meeting. One across the street at
17 EP and another one upstairs. So why don't we let the
18 members of the committee ask questions, and then
19 we'll come back to the chairs. The first one is
20 Cabrera, um, followed by Cohen.

21 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Thank you so much
22 to both chairs. Commissioners, it's a pleasure to
23 see you today. I just wanted to first let you know
24 that last night I had the pleasure of being at the
25 Dominican Institute where finally we were able after

a three-year study and investing about \$60,000 we now know the Dominicans who fought in World War II. Um, there's about 300 of them. Um, a couple of them, believe it or not, they're alive. One of them was one of Tuskegee men. Um, there's so much history. It's very rich, um, and the sedition is still going on in the Dominican Institute. I also, Commissioner, I wanted to commend you for the Opening Doors that you're having in collaboration with churches to be able to house, um, the homeless, and I mean to--My first question is directed to that. Would that be like a suitable place for veterans to go? Or do--is there another pathway, um, if one of the veterans--let's say if they feel comfortable going in a church where you have this situation, this situation that you're creating.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So our Opening Doors Initiative is to create more Safe Haven and stabilization by capacity, which is really targeting clients who are unsheltered and living on the street or in a subway. Um, so yes, for any veteran the eight that we have on our caseload that would be--those would be designated--they can access. Um, we are very, very fortunate to have a strong

partnerships with many houses of worship to help us
to get to our goal of 500 beds. Right now we have
436 beds that are committed.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: All right.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, and so we are
working to actually bring them up and get them
running as the winter months come upon us. Um, for
any other veteran who is, um, you know, who is--who
is un-housed, you know, we have our shelter system,
and it's available, um, and, you know, ready to serve
them in terms of helping them to find a housing
situation. But I go back to what I was saying to
Chairman Leven in that if there are veterans who are
housing unstable--and I make the distinction between
the population because we really want to use all of
the resources that we have in order to keep people
housed. And it may not mean staying where you are,
but if there is an option for us to identify another
housing situation that could become available quickly
enough to obviate the need for you to have to leave
where you are to come into shelter, and be placed
into another housing situation, we'd like to do that,
and we have the resources to do it. And so, I talk
about Home Base all the time, and the reason why is

because it actually does work. Um, and it is in all five boroughs, and I can make sure that anyone who wants information about it can have it, and we have special modality for veterans now in our Home Base programming as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Well, let me commend you with the numbers. To be honest with you, I didn't expect that--and it's only been a couple of months. I was in the very first meeting. I'm impressed how fast you have been able to accelerate, um, the--you know, the expansion of beds. And the reality is to some people it may feel safer for whatever reason in a house of worship, or, you know, if they're from an environment that they enjoy being-- You know, it's a personal preference. So I'm glad that we have that option. My next question is in regards to, um, the veterans homeless population. Do you happen to have a ratio breakdown?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: A racial breakdown?

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, I have ethnicity.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

[background comments]

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: I have--so our last fact sheet on veterans who are in our system, this is actually dated August of 2015. At the time, um, there were--I don't know. I do have a base--a base breakdown. There were 68% Black of African-American and this is what our clients self-identify as in terms of their rate of base ethnicity. Um, 21% were Caucasian; 2% other; 1% Asian; and then there was another 9% for whom we cannot get the information.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And did you enter the Latinos, do you know? (sic)

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: I did not. See, this breakdown is confusing to me. Can you--can you help me with this? The ethnicity has Latino, but it doesn't have race linking this in. Okay, come on in.

DR. BENJAMIN CHARVAT: Hi. It's 16% Latino.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: 16, 1-6? Okay. Um, and my last question is in regards--in--in terms of count--county. So a homeless veteran goes in. Um, he's taken of the list of those who are homeless. How many end up of those who go in, end up coming out? You know, they go in like in a revolving kind

of cycle door, and kind of reflect. (sic) Do you
happen to have those numbers?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, no I don't have
those numbers right now. I can get them to you, but
I can--I can tell you anecdotally. So there are
three categories of veterans that we're housing
within the DHS system, right? And so we have single
individuals. We have adult families, and we have
families with children, and the numbers, um, break
down so that the majority of homeless veterans in our
system are single individuals. Um, then followed
by, um, families with children, which I think is
somewhere like 66 families with children. So that
would be a head of household who's in shelter, who's
a veteran with their child, um, or a caretaker who is
a veteran with their--with the child who's in their
home. Then we have 49% adult families, and these are
predominantly couples, right? And so I do remember
one of the adult families was--Um, both partners were
veterans, right? And so, placing that one household
would then net a reduction of two in our census
because they were both together in shelter.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: All right.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: But looking at those categories to answer your question about the churn or about the turnover in movement, it tends to be more pronounced on the single side, right? And so single individuals tend to come and go more frequently across our system, and it's not unique to veterans. Um, not so much for families with children. Because they have young children in the household, they stay, you know, in place, and the same is true for adult families. Um, but for veterans who may leave the system, um, typically they will leave for a very short period of time, and they'll come back. And so, we know who they are, and that when they return we have an opportunity to re-engage them around, um, what could be a potential housing resource if there was one, right. And so, if someone had left to go visit a relative, the question we would ask would be is that relative someone that we could perhaps, um, work with you to identify a potential housing situation with? But for all three groups, it's really the--the singles that have more of a churn than we--than the families, um, population in our system.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So that--the
number that you gave us today of eight of them being
homeless in the street--

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing] Uh-
huh.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA:--that includes
turnovers that a group would--what are we now? This
is occurring now that you gave us also today--

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing]
Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --that we just
checked this morning. (sic)

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Correct. But these
are eight who are--who are not in shelter. There are
eight who will not come into shelter who we're trying
to bring into shelter. So we don't--they do not go
into that group.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Do you--do you
count--I'm just trying to get a handle on the numbers
because, um, what happens is when we have this
hearing sometimes I'll look at the advocates, and
when you--when you say eight, I look at their faces
like there's a sight of disbelief. So I'm trying to
get a, you know, a handle on this--

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing] Uh-
huh.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --as to how the
numbers come about. So, if--if somebody--let's say,
suppose, left today, right.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing] Uh-
huh.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Would that
person be considered in street homelessness?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: No. They would not
be considered street homeless unless--

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]
And my point are they considered?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: I'm sorry for
interrupting, but I'm just trying to get--at what
point are you consider these street homeless? Like
how many days do you not show up to your shelter?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So it's actually
not a correlation in terms of you being out of
shelter. It's a--it correlates with how many times
our outreach teams have met you or seen you on the
street, right, and have asked you about your housing
situation, and if your information to them is I'm

here. I'm not--you know, I'm not housed. So that then gets you onto our caseload.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Got you.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: And so if you leave--if a single individual left shelter today, you know, we would not automatically assume they were leaving to go live on the street. It could very well be the case that they were going to a housing situation, or they could just be leaving for, um, you know, for whatever reason and come right back. But we don't automatically assume that everyone who leaves shelter would then become street homeless.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay. Now, I've got clarity. Thank you so much. Keep up the good work. I'd love--I'm glad to hear about, um, how you are become more strategic in your approach, the peer approach is just--to me it's the most credible way and the secure way to reach out to veterans who are homeless. Um, I'm going to turn it back to the chairs.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council Member Cabrera. Um, if we can we'll--we'll--because there are several more members who want to speak and the Administration has been very generous with time.

If we could limit the exchange between members and the Administration to five minutes each. Is that okay?

COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic] That's too long?

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: All right, that's too long. I'm being generous. So I got my bill passed so I'm in a good mood. So, you know this is-- [background comments] Um, we're going to hear from Council Member Cohen, then Palma and Vanessa Gibson. So first we'll hear from Andy Cohen of the Bronx.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Commissioners. Um, in terms of the--the--first of all the 847 figure, that is of August or that is as of today?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: That is of today.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: As of today. Um, you said you had two dedicated shelters, um, for veterans?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: In the DHS system, we have two that are predominantly filled with single veterans, Porter Avenue and Borden (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Within the DHS system do you contract for other?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: No there are 191
veterans who are in shelter with the Veterans
Administration in their shelters.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: The VA shelters?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: In the VA shelters,
and balance are in DHS shelters.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: The two shelters
that you have those are for single men?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: They are.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: So if you're a
head of household vet with a family, would you not go
to a dedicated veteran shelter?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: That's correct.
You would go into our family shelters. Um, and so in
our family shelters we don't have, um, any
specialization for veterans work, but we do have
resources who we've now hired that we've testified to
who are being made available to serve veteran head of
households who are in shelter with their children.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: How many dedicated
single men vets do you have in your shelters?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, Borden Avenue,
which is lead by the Institute of Community Living
has the capacity of 243 beds. We have a lot in stake

and I believe Borden is a mixed gender. It's mixed gender. It's men and women.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: 28.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Okay. Okay, there's a lot coming at me right now.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay. [laughter]

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Bear with me okay. Borden is mixed gender. Um, I can give you the right write down in terms of how many males and how many females. Um, Porter is all men and Porter is--there are 138 veteran beds at Porter Avenue of 400 total beds in the building. So 438 of them are dedicated to veterans.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: So if they--if one of these eight street homeless came in, assuming they were single men at Porter you could--that number is flexible?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Yes, to the extent that we have capacity. Um, by that I mean as I have testified to, clients who thankfully are signing leases and clients who are moving as expeditiously as we can have them move. We have Veteran Peer Coordinators who work for MOVA co-located at both sites. So they're onsite helping with--helping the

1 veterans with the process. We also have housing
2 specialists who have case managers. We have the full
3 complement of all social service staff, a wraparound
4 of veterans to help them move to housing permanency
5 as quickly as possible. And that we can open up
6 capacity for anyone who would need a specialized bed
7 in one of those sites.
8

9 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: So you have 138
10 specialized beds. That's not necessarily consistent
11 with--if--if all eight decided to come in tomorrow,
12 you might--they might be sort of on a waiting list
13 for a specialized bed?

14 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: If there aren't any
15 vacancies at that particular site that could be the
16 case. We also have beds at 30th Street, which is our
17 direct one site, which we have slated specifically
18 for veterans as well. And so, really building up
19 concentrations of capacity within our system across
20 the board so that beyond Borden and beyond Porter we
21 would have other beds that have to be targeted for
22 veterans. And then, we can move them to Borden and
23 Porter as those beds open up.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: You--you know,
25 obviously you don't anticipate the population spiking

over the winter as you've identified a very small group?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: I mean we know that seasonality does have an impact in terms of our single adult shelter system. We do know that more people on the single side of our system can enter shelter during the winter months. It's hard to predict what portion of those individuals will be veterans. Um, we will be--clearly, everyone who comes through the front door we're asking the question. We're also checking the names to get a sense of exactly who the veterans are. Um, but our hope is that our prevention measures as well as our rapidly housing measures at the front door will help us to offset any increase in this population because they're key components to the strategy. If we don't control the front door, then the back door will be impossible to manage. So the rapidly housing pieces that I mentioned as well as the prevention pieces specifically for veterans in partnership with us as we have--will help us to gauge for that.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And you said that--
-I guess it's a goal to have people out of--the

veterans out of the shelter within 90 days. Do you
know what the average stay is currently?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, so the goal--
when we--when we achieve our Functional Zero, our
goal is to house all veterans within a 90-day period.
I'm trying to get a sense of what the average length
of stay is for veterans currently in our system if it
is on here. I see it. Um, and thus far in the past
four years--so this is over a four-year period--it
has been much longer than that. It has actually been
303 days for veterans.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: But, I will say
that that is distinguished by the efforts of Mission
Home, which really coalesced last year when you have
multiple agencies. You have NYCHA. You have HPD.
You have HRA. You have MOVA. You have DHS all
agencies literally working [bell] together and
talking together everyday. And so to amplify
Commissioner Sutton's point, as we sit here offering
this testimony there are staff who are back at DHS
who are talking about veterans and going line by
line, veteran by veteran. Does this veteran have the
resource they need to move? If they do, where is the

unit that they need to move into? What, if any, are the systemic barriers that are preventing them from moving in as quickly as possible? Aligning a date for them to actually move by. We have someone working with vets, specific veteran who is not in that room, telling the veteran you have this resource. This is the place that we want to identify for you to go view. We want to make sure that you're ready to move. What do you need from us? At this juncture, it is truly--um, it is a machine. I mean we are--we are truly across agencies, um, rolling up our sleeves and thus working this everyday, um, including weekends, including nights and just really driving towards our goal.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: If you would allow me just one quick follow-up question. In terms of if I were not a veteran, and I was a single adult male in the shelter system, what is my average stay then?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So the average length of stay then for the single adult system I know we have it somewhere with us, but it's comparable to what I have just spoken to. Um, but it's over a course of four years, right. So because there's this churning in the single adult system, the

majority of single adults in our system don't stay for a consecutive period of time. Like today, they won't stay for a full one-year period. They'll come and go and come and go and come and go. When you total it up, it totals that--that length of stay. And that's the system where the churn is so dynamic that it's-- Go ahead. He knows this.

DR. BENJAMIN CHARVAT: It's 394 days over a four-year period.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Andrew Cohen. Um, before we turn it over to Council Member, I do just want to take this opportunity. We have two Marine Corps veterans that are part of the Council's team. I just wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge. Humberto Corriato (sp?) our Sergeant-at-Arms, who you all know. [applause] A Marine Corps veteran and Romani Bravo Lopez (sp?) from my staff, a Marine Corps veteran as well. Thank you both for your time. [applause]

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Commissioner, I just have just quick follow-up questions in terms of, um, the 300--300 veterans

we keep mentioning. How many are--how many of those veterans are women?

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Do you have by gender with you? How many are women?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So I can just say in terms of the eight street count list, there's one woman on that list. Um, in terms of percentages, it's roughly 5% of our total. We can get the exact number for you, but those are the, um, numbers for street homeless one, and then overall about 5% are women.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And these--and these would be individual women with no--with no children.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So it's actually a mix.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: It could be single women who are in a shelter system. It could be women who are in shelter with their children. It could also be women who are in shelter with their partners, part of an adult family.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So they make up the 5% out of the homeless population that we see now in the shelter system.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So I want to make
sure that we give you the number.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Okay.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Benjamin Charvat
has that number. He's looking at it now.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Okay, thank you
and--and I--I want, um, I want to talk a little bit
about, or I want to further understand the Rapid Re-
Housing Program and how--are there any criteria
attached to--to qualifying for that program, and if
so what are they, and how does--how quickly can a
veteran apply for them once they're identified as
being homeless. And then how a landlord is receiving
that type of incentive or program?

COMMISSIONER BRANCA: So there--there are
many Rapid Re-Housing subsidy programs that exist.
In this case, we're--we're being descriptive of how
we are housing people. It's not actually a rapid re-
housing subsidy. There are some out there, and it's
still being used a little bit by veterans. For the
most part, all of the subsidies we're getting
veterans are the Federal Section 8--the local link or
the SEPS.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So it's the same--
the same subsidies that any other homeless person
qualifies for just that you're prioritizing veterans?

COMMISSIONER BRANCA: We're just trying
to--we're saying we're rapidly, meaning within 90
days we're going to rapidly re-house them with those
subsidies.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Um, what is the--
what are the response from landlords? Because I know
that within my community there are certain
individuals that have come into the office where
landlords are not accepting the--the resources or the
subsidies and, therefore, make it for the building
for veterans to be housed? (sic)

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So, Council Member,
to answer your question, there are 88 women who are
veterans in our system. Um, to your second question
about the landlord response to our programs. So it
has been--I will tell you it's much better now than
it had been last year. Um, when we had launched our
programs in September of 2014, particularly LINC,
there were lots of challenges associated with
community or landlord community orientations of the
program and education about what they meant as well

as overcoming some of the distress associated with city rental assistance programs with the end of Advantage. Um, we have--we continue to see our programs being accepted by a large number of landlords throughout the city. We are very fortunate to have largely brokers who have been very helpful in marketing our programs to landlords and connecting our clients to available units. And so, for this population, you know, clients are renting rooms. Clients are renting apartments. You know, it depends upon what housing situation they are looking for. Some clients are going to supportive housing. Some clients are, um, reconnecting with family members and friends, and we have a subsidy for that as well. And so casting our net wide and thus making sure that we're being aggressive in marketing our programs that will hopefully yield more traction in terms of they're being accepted by landlords throughout the city. But we're much further along now than we had been before.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you, Council Member Palma. Now Council Member Gibson, and we'll make this the last question for the

Administration, the last set of questions because it is 3 o'clock, and I have a few that will follow those at the end. All right, so Council Member Gibson.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Great. So I'll be quick. Thank you, Chairs. I appreciate it. Thank you, Commissioner, too, and your team. I really appreciate all the work that this administration is really doing to really recognize and acknowledge all the work veterans have been doing. I just want to give a shout out. The boy behind you, Melvin Romero, is a good friend of mine. I know him well, and the work he's been doing in the Bronx--the Bronx. I just wanted to ask a question. I've been very blessed because last week Urban Pathways opened a new residence for veterans on Boston Road and Community Board 3, and I also have an upcoming project being built by Services for the Underserved on Cliff Adams. (sic) So I'm very happy that we are recognizing that there is a lot of value in housing--permanent affordable housing for veterans. We don't do enough for veterans, but many of my community boards have really been crying about it. And some of the proposals we've been getting, we have been declining them, and now they have been

1 coming back with veterans housing. So I just want
2 you to know that on a community level we're also
3 having the very same conversation. What I wanted to
4 find out is how we stimulate and drive a lot of the
5 new housing with Housing NY, the Mayor's plan. How
6 we are providing the incentives to have more Urban
7 Pathways or SUS or more providers that are looking
8 for tax credits and other incentives. How we can get
9 them to have more of a focus on veterans because it's
10 happening, but it's obviously not happening at such a
11 rapid pace as what we need. And with, you know, the
12 Safe Haven, with Catholic Charities and others--other
13 measures that we're looking at, how can we provide
14 more incentives from your perspective on building
15 more housing for veterans?
16

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you so much,
18 Council Member. All along, we've recognized that
19 this is a campaign that has an immediate term set of
20 actions, a short-term set of actions that take us
21 through the end of this calendar year, mid-term and a
22 longer term. So those questions that you're
23 identifying are absolutely spot on for the areas of
24 focus that we will be taking on after we reach
25 Functional Zero, and then transitioning into

sustainability, which does include more veteran specific developments like Urban Pathways. And like you, I was so excited to be there last week at the opening, and we're very excited about the opportunities, as well as the support from the Mayor, this administration, the City Council, and the--the community of brokers and developers who are here in New York that are excited to be part of this effort. You know, the Mayor hosted a roundtable a couple, maybe two or three weeks ago where, you know, some of the larger, um, brokers and landlords, and development companies were all there around the table. And it was amazing, you know, how many of them had parents who were veterans or relatives who in some cases were veterans themselves. And this is a tremendous, um, you know, storehouse of good will, and patriotism and recognition that supporting our veterans is not just the right thing to do. It's the smart thing to do, and as recently as this morning-- I'm looking at Joe Bello now who is rubbing his eyes because he's a little bit tired from all that's been going on this last week. But we had the opportunity to sit down with Secretary McDonald, the Secretary of the VA, and we were there at Borden Shelter this

1 morning, and Secretary McDonald was sharing with us
2 as we were talking with some of the Borden Shelter
3 residents as well as a whole group of folks that was
4 there to be part of that conversation. Secretary
5 McDonald highlighted that as he goes across the
6 country the experience has been very much like we've
7 experienced in--with many of our veterans and our
8 landlords here in New York. But perhaps there may be
9 a little resistance upfront, but once that landlords
10 like Christine that Nicole mentioned and others, once
11 they realize how veterans--you know, they show up.
12 They clean up. They organize and they are very much
13 vested in community. Very much the kind of community
14 that Melvin is working to create with his work with
15 Volunteers of America. Also, the kind of community
16 for women veterans that we know are so important. So
17 this is work that is ongoing.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]

20 Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And as we move into
22 the new year, you will absolutely see a razor focus
23 on the sustainability piece, which is also part of
24 our strategy.

25 COMMISSIONER BRANCA: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, and let me just say as my time runs down that, you know, it's very important for many of us that are going through potential zoning changes that DHS is at the table with a lot of the new development and economic development opportunities. And also, I'd like it if we can--I know there is a small population, but I really think we should develop a plan that's very unique [bell] for female veterans.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Female veterans go through very unique challenges that are different from our male counterparts, and the ones that I have met, you know, don't always feel like--You know, we can't have a general plan that works for every veteran. I think we should have something very specific and unique for females even though the percentage is low but very important as we move forward. And thank you, Mr. Chair, and certainly, because of the advocacy of our Council Member Ulrich we now have a new Veteran Affairs Department. So that is going to make a huge difference in this conversation having dedicated services in looking at

the entire plan of housing and services for many of
our vets. So, thank you, Council Member, again for
your leadership.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much,
Council Member Gibson, and again I do want to be
respectful. The Administration has been very
generous. It's 3 o'clock, and I know a number of the
advocates also want to testify. So we want to
respectful of their time as well. I want to thank
the two of you for your testimony, and also thank our
first lady, Michelle Obama, for really spearheading
this national effort to end veteran's homelessness.
I don't think we could find a greater cause
especially in our city. So thank you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Mr. Chairman, if I
could just add one other thing. What we didn't
mention this afternoon is the vital role of 311. So
for any of you, if you encounter not just a homeless
veteran, but a homeless individual on the streets of
New York, please call 311. The outreach team that
Commissioner Taylor referenced is absolutely there
24/7 to go engage with that individual, and to get
them sheltered and get them what they need, and get
their lives back on track. So again, it's another

real resource and strength that our city has, and
we'll continue to build on it. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: And Chairman, the
Commissioner reminded me if anyone has an apartment
or room that they're interested in renting to a
veteran (laughter) please call 311, and we can--we
can take it from there. Okay. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Thank
you again. Thank the Administration thank you.

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you very
much.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The first panel of
advocates will consist of Gary Bernstein, Peter
Kempner, Coco Culhane [sp?], and Kristen Rouse. We
will give five minutes each to them. [background
comments] And again, I just want to remind everybody
some of my colleagues are in and out today. There
are several other hearings going on here. Thank you.
Thank you, Commissioner. Again, our first panel is
Mr. Gary Bernstein, Peter Kempner, Coco Culhane, and
Kristen Rouse. [pause] I'll ask our Committee
counsel to administer the oath, and then we will
begin. We'll start from right to left. So we'll
star--oh, we don't have to--we don't have to swear

you in. So, that's a--that's a good thing. Be careful. All right. So why don't we start with Kristin and we'll put the clock at five minutes for each speaker, and you may begin when you're ready.

Good afternoon, Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kristen Rouse. I am speaking on behalf of the New York City Veterans Alliance. I'm a veteran of the United States Army. I served three tours of duty in Afghanistan and I've lived in Brooklyn since leaving active duty in 2007. A concerted between the federal government, city government and the non-profit sector in New York City to end veteran homelessness as we've heard today has been a tremendous success. And proof that when leaders commit to the staffing, resources, planning and coordination to tackle complex problems, great progress can be made. We applaud the painstaking work of all those who have moved thousands of homeless veterans off the streets and out of shelters and into permanent housing. For so many, the programs in place have indeed worked as designed. Yet, for the smaller, there is still a significant number of struggling veterans who still remain on the margins. Still, more work needs to be

done. Yesterday at the Mayor's Veterans Day Breakfast, it was heartening to hear the Mayor speak passionately about the successes of the city's effort to end homelessness just as we heard the Administration speak of today. He said for the remaining number of homeless veterans, we know each one of them, and that the city was continuing work to help them. This is indeed an accomplishment, and I applaud our city government for its tremendous work to help veterans remaining in the system. What I am here to point out, however, is that there are still veterans outside of the system who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, and we still do not know them. Just as there are far more individuals who are going hungry every night, they never apply for food stamps or other public assistance. We hear all the time about veterans who are not reaching out to the public system for assistance with their struggles to find or stay in a home. Veterans are resilient and resourceful individuals, and we hear often about cases where a veteran is couch surfing with friends, sleeping in the room of the workplace, or the National Guard Armory or hidden away on a rooftop, in a car or other hard to find places because they don't

1 want to reach out for help. Or because resources to
2 help them simply are not there. Programs to prevent
3 veterans from becoming homeless are still too few, and
4 veterans are too often told that programs are
5 unavailable for them until they're actually homeless
6 for at least 30 to 90 days, or living in a public
7 shelter for a certain amount of time. The shortage
8 of available affordable housing is a citywide issue,
9 and we applaud the city's new effort to educate and
10 provide incentives for landlords to accept veterans
11 using housing vouchers. This is vital especially in
12 that HUD VASH Voucher rates fall so much lower than
13 the market rate of so much of New York City's housing
14 stock. Yet, this doesn't address the struggles of
15 the average veteran trying to make ends meet in New
16 York City. Veterans come home to New York City after
17 recent deployments faced--and face the same scarcity
18 of jobs and skyrocketing housing markets as every
19 other New Yorker. For example, after I came home
20 from my most recent deployment to Afghanistan, I had
21 to hire a broker and pay premium rent for my current
22 apartment because I couldn't keep my last apartment
23 while I was deployed. Now, I'm paying more in rent
24 than I would have if I hadn't deployed for the third
25

time, and I count myself among the lucky ones. Younger veterans in particular at the ones most like to be outside of the existing system. They are detected surviving in the short-term with few resources and are not detected by routine homelessness counts or outreach. They may be facing poverty for the first time, and find themselves alienated by shelters that may expose them to drug use, recreate symptoms or recreate situations similar to those in which military sexual trauma occurs, or overwhelmingly aggravate symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Despite being highly capable individuals, some of these veterans are extremely vulnerable living on the edge spiraling further into poverty and illness. Bringing these men and women into programs that adapt to their needs requires creative efforts and additional funding. And that cause pales in comparison to what will be needed if they become chronically homeless. As we approach the end of 2015, we can celebrate the great successes of ending homelessness for a truly remarkable number of veterans. But when the city talks about Functional Zero, we must take into account that the many veterans who still remain invisible to the system.

And that younger veterans in particular who are contending with New York City's start economic realities maybe at risk for homelessness on the new or long term. Veterans must be included in any city effort to provide affordable housing not just for the recently homeless, but to prevent veteran homelessness in the future. And to ensure that veterans haven't been left behind by the rest of New York City because of their military services. More must be put into placing--must more be put into-- must--more must be put into place to prevent veteran homelessness and to provide immediately--immediate help for those who are struggling right now to make ends meet. There must be more for veterans with families. There must be more places to go for veterans who have service animals. In short, resources to prevent and mitigate veteran homelessness must continue well beyond 2015. [bell]

Recent successes are well worth celebrating, but New York City must further focus and refine the existing system to reach those still struggling in the margins and to ensure that more veterans do not end up in the system in the future. On behalf of the New York City Veterans Alliance, I thank you for the opportunity to

testify today. Pending your questions, this
concludes my testimony.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Coco.
We'll save the questions until the panel is
completed. Coco, go ahead.

COCO CULHANE: Hi, I'm Coco Culhane from
the Veteran Advocacy Project at the Urban Justice
Center, and I'll skip most of my testimony. I think
that Kristen has covered it, and some of the
questions before covered it, but I'd like to
highlight that there are so many veterans who are not
a part of the DHS system. You know, as was stated
before, they're couch surfing. They're sleeping in
their cars. Um, and I think that we need to
absolutely celebrate the success and how much
progress the city has made. But keep in mind that
Functional Zero is a dangerous term I think, and
signals to the public that, you know, we've
accomplished something and we're set, and the tax
dollars solved it, and we can move on when that's not
true at all. And I just want to say, you know, I
know that our client database has the names of men
and women who are homeless, and DHS doesn't have
those names. And I think it's ludicrous to say that

1 we know every single homeless veteran out there. Um,
2 I think there are a lot of different definitions and
3 terms being used, and we need to be careful about
4 what they actually mean. There are just too many who
5 suffer from--you know, who can't even stand in the
6 lines at the Bellevue Intake Center let alone try to
7 stay there overnight. I mean with post-traumatic
8 stress, it can be near impossible for a lot of
9 veterans. So I just wanted to highlight that, and
10 say that those are the cases I think are remaining,
11 and that we all are going to need to come up with
12 creative solutions to help those individuals.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Peter.

15 [pause]

16 PETER KEMPNER: Good afternoon. My name
17 is Peter Kempner. I'm the Director of the Veterans
18 Justice Project at Legal Services NYC's Brooklyn
19 programs. I, too, will dispense with some of my
20 formal comments that will be going to the record, but
21 I will--I do want to speak to the--to the programs
22 that are out there, and what could be on the horizon
23 in New York City as far as addressing the
24 sustainability of dealing with veteran homelessness.
25 The VA has poured tens of millions of dollars

1 nationwide into--into three programs. There's the
2 SSVF Program, the Grants and Per Diem Program and the
3 HUD VASH Section 8. SSVF Supportive Services for
4 families, this money is meant to on one-half do a
5 veteran prevention work to pay rent arrears for
6 veterans who are facing non-payment of rent cases.
7 And the other half is used for the Rapid Re-Housing
8 of veterans who are currently homeless, and getting
9 them into permanent housing. Grants and Per Diem
10 provides funding to house veterans in supportive
11 housing programs instead of traditional shelters.
12 And lastly, there's the HUD VASH Section 8 program,
13 and really, this is the most important program we're
14 looking at in terms of the sustainability of dealing
15 with veteran homelessness because this greatly
16 expands the number of Section 8 vouchers that are
17 available to homeless veterans, you know. And then,
18 they only have to pay 30% of their income as their
19 share of the rent. And this makes permanent housing
20 sustainable for them. But I think as mentioned
21 before unfortunately really in order to qualify for a
22 Section 8 voucher here in New York City you--you have
23 to go into the shelter system. And so, what we're
24 looking at is people--veterans having to become
25

homeless in the first place or being threatened with eviction before they are given the help that they need. The affordability of housing in New York City is one of the main key issues that must be addressed in tackling the problem of veteran homelessness. This is especially true for disabled veterans whose sole source of income is disability benefits from the VA. There's two main types of benefits that--that disabled veterans get from the VA. First is a disability pension, and the other is service connected disability benefits. Veterans who receive the VA pension have served during wartime, and are either totally and permanently disabled, or are over the age of 65, and they really have no other source of income other than this VA pension. Those folks only receive \$1,072 per month from the VA. That kind of income level does not make it possible for them to find housing in New York City. Folks who are receiving--veterans who are receiving service connected disability benefits, and service connected disability benefits is given in 10% increments. So it's really not until you get to the higher levels of disability that you have anything that's really any kind of significant income. Veterans who receive 50%

disability rating only get \$836 a month. 60%
disability rating you only get \$1,059 a month.
Again, this is not enough to find housing in New York
City. It's not until you get to the 90 or 100%
disability rating that they receive significant
enough income to find housing, and even then it's
difficult. 90% you get \$1,743 a month, and only at
100% do you get \$2,906 a month, and that's a point at
which it is--it is possible to find safe and
affordable housing. But really those other disabled
veterans who have no other source of income cannot
find safe and affordable housing in New York City.
Many of the members of both of the committees holding
this hearing today have co-sponsored legislation,
which would address this very issue, and which would
be revolutionary frankly in fighting veteran
homelessness in New York City. Introduction 792
would require that New York City provide rental
assistance to disabled veterans receive a 50% or
above disability rating or who receive VA pension so
long as their total income falls below 200% of the
poverty level, and so long as the housing they find
is within the fair market rent amount set by HUD,
which is the same standard that's being used for the

HUD Section 8 vouchers. You know, this would really allow veterans in New York City to find housing, and, keep their housing, and not have to go into the shelter system in the first place. You know, this was mentioned earlier by both commissioners, and I think it's worth repeating [bell] that the best way to stop veteran homelessness is to stop it from happening in the first place. With that, I know my time is up. I thank the committee for holding this hearing, and thank you for giving me this time to speak, and we look forward to working with you in the future to address this issue. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So I just have one quick question on your testimony.

PETER KEMPNER: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, when--can you give an example of what 90 or 100% disability translates to? What--what is an example of someone that is 100% disabled?

PETER KEMPNER: I mean this is somebody who really is--is functionally unable to work for the rest of their lives. It's a total and permanent disability standard to be found to 100% disabled. And I think many folks who work with veterans who are

disabled, you know, it's really tough to get to that level. So we have--we--we encounter many veterans who are--who are really profoundly disabled, but the VA has found the disabled even at the lower levels. In some ways it's a more exacting level--standard than what the Social Security Administration has disability.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For SSD.

PETER KEMPNER: Yes. for SSD or SSI.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh. Um, okay and that's all set on the federal level.

PETER KEMPNER: That is all set on the federal level yes, and, you know, it is adjusted every year because there's cost of living adjustments.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] For New York City's it's not required--is--is that the--

PETER KEMPNER: [interposing] Yes. If you're a disabled veteran in Mississippi, you're going to get the same amount you got here in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So it's not tied to say AMI regionally or something?

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

88

PETER KEMPNER: Absolutely not.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think it should be
tied to a regional amount. (sic)

PETER KEMPNER: That would be great. Um,
and I also I will say as far as the COLA is
concerned, the federal government has found this year
that there was no--that inflation was low enough, and
veterans will not be getting any more benefits come
January 1st, 2016.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No COLA?

PETER KEMPNER: No COLA.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We want to take
testimony here.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry. I'm sorry.

COCO CULHANE: I just want to say you can
be 100% disabled by the VA and be working as a big
CEO of a company, but it's not actually--I mean the
VA's standards I think it's--it's important to
recognize that it's not any different than Social
Security. I think it does a disservice to a lot of
veterans who are out there functioning and working,
you know, with the disabilities that they have.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, no, absolutely.
I was just wondering kind of to get a picture for the
record of what some--what an example of what it may
be.

PETER KEMPNER: And--and what--what is
great about the bill is that it not only looks at the
disability level, but it also looks at overall
income. So--so Coco is right. You could have other
income coming in and be considered 100% disables, but
this ties it not only to disability, but also ties it
to the federal poverty level. So if you have other
income you will not qualify.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [off mic] Mr.
Bernstein, you are up.

GARY BERNSTEIN: Good afternoon. Thank
you. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here
today. I'll be brief. I'm Gary Bernstein. I'm the
Chief Program Officer at Jericho Project. Jericho
Project serves over 550 through supportive housing
programs, employment services, and homelessness
prevention and Rapid Re-Housing. Jericho has
developed a series of programs to support veterans
with different needs from shortening long-term

supportive housing, rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention to targeted employment and income enhancement services. Jericho opened Fordham Village in 2011 and Kings Bridge Terrace in 2012. Both are state-of-the art LEED Certified veteran residences in the Bronx, which together serves 132 male and female veterans from all areas. Additionally, in June 2015, Jericho began construction on its third supportive housing residence with veterans in the Bronx, Walton Avenue, which will be home to 56 veterans. The de Blasio Administration has made an unprecedented commitment to ending veteran's homelessness, and is working closely with advocates like the Jericho Project to provide our veterans with the quality housing, stability and supports they deserve. Jericho Project supports and is appreciative of the Mayor's leadership and efforts to end veteran--end homelessness among veterans. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, and just a side note, the City Council appropriated several weeks ago a small, but hopefully a meaningful grant for the organization, and I think it was in amount of \$50,000 as part of the Veterans Initiative. So \$50,000 went to--went to your group, and we hope that

you will explore and find other housing options for veterans. I know Councilman Levin had a few comments, and then I'll call the next panel.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. This is a question for Coco. If--I wanted to ask--you mentioned that your organization had contact with--with veterans who are homeless in some fashion that, you know, you don't believe are on the VHS list. Have you shared that with--have you shared your list with DHS or with MOVA?

COCO CULHANE: [off mic] I'm--so I--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Sorry.

COCO CULHANE: [off mic] So we can't do that. I really--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I'm sorry. Here.

COCO CULHANE: [on mic] Is it on now?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

COCO CULHANE: I can't do that as an attorney. When we have confidentiality--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

COCO CULHANE: --we try to encourage--you know, we also partner with Jericho Project. We try to encourage our clients to work though other

avenues. We've made ADA requests, um, through DHS.
We haven't had much luck so far?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And how many are we
talking about, or how many individuals are you
talking about?

COCO CULHANE: I mean I would have to go
through our entire database, but I--I can safely
estimate right now we're at least 20 individuals.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I mean it's
not like several hundred, so it's in the--

COCO CULHANE: [interposing] No, I mean
the other--the other piece of that story I guess I
should say is that a lot of the--a lot of our clients
have bad dischargers, and they're not able to get any
of the support like, you know, you can't get the SSVF
or HUD VASH Vouchers and all that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For a dishonorable
discharge an individual is not allowed to access any
of those federal vouchers?

COCO CULHANE: It's basically for other
than honorable, and under, though there's a process
through the VA that can grant other than honorable
discharge some other benefits.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, how about PLA for city benefits? So like if--do you know about like if--and maybe this is a question I need to ask the administration, but like for other than a VASH, right, there's LINC. There's other things that are not. These are city tax levy. There's no federal dollars being used that might prevent a, you know, a discharge compilation. (sic)

COCO CULHANE: No, I mean that--for those clients that we have there they can use all the other resources that any other homeless person would be able to use, but I don't know if you saw yesterday or the day before the--it was revealed that only 20% of the LINC vouchers have actually been utilized because landlords are rejecting them. So there are a lot problems that--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] No, I was just wondering like when we say that are eight homeless vets in New York City living on the street like it--are those eight are we say eight honorably discharged veterans or eight or does that include everybody that served in the military regardless of their discharge?

COCO CULHANE: I could not answer that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. I'll
follow up with the Administration. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: All right, Council
Member--anybody else? No. Okay. So I want to thank
you for your testimony. We're going to get to the
last panel now. Thank you Peter and Coco and Mr.
Bernstein and Kristen thank you as always for your
testimony, and the last panel consists of Craig
Karawana, Latasha Peeler (sp?). I hope I said that
correct, Peeler. Ms. Peeler, yes ma'am. David
Stiffler (sp?) and Leonelle Hamanaka (sp?), but I
think she left but I do want the record to reflect
that she did sign up to speak. [background comments]
And we'll begin left to right now because we did
right to left last time. [background comments] All
right, Craig, you're up.

CRAIG KARAWANA: Thank you, Chairman
Ulrich and Chairman Levin for having this hearing
today on Veteran's Homelessness. We've testified in
the past America Works a job placement program for
homeless military veterans. Since 2009, we've placed
over 800 homeless military veterans into employment
and, of course, over our 31-year history placed
thousands more veterans into employment. Today,

we'll just discuss what we've seen in the homeless veterans of the community, and just some of the our ideas of how the City can improve services for homeless veterans. We believe there should be a work component to any program designed to assist homeless veterans. The official number of homeless veterans that will be discussed today no the street is decreasing. But too often we feel we're just talking about sheltering veterans when in reality they're still dependent upon government and social services organizations for their livelihood. So, many of the veterans we see come to us, of course, not just through word of mouth, but through the HRA and other social service organizations, the VA and their livelihood is still dependent on these organizations and we feel the reason is that a lot of these programs don't have a work component to that. And only related to work will they start to have a source of income and, of course, stabilize their life, and then really begin to integrate back into society. And once they are self-sufficient, then we should no longer consider them homeless. America Works welcomes in the Department of Veterans Services and we feel the way work can be integrated into these

1 programs is for this new department to be able to
2 issue paper performance contracting to different
3 organizations with the work component tied to it. So
4 this way we can have a city agency be responsible for
5 veterans employment, and this will have--these
6 programs will have metrics and goals that will be
7 tied to funding so that we'll know how well we're all
8 doing our job of actually getting veterans employed.
9 And once we do this, we could, you know, truly end
10 veterans homelessness, and have our veterans who are
11 either homeless or in danger of becoming homeless
12 tied to a job. And once again, leading to our point
13 of they'll be self-sufficient. And on the last note,
14 I'll just like to talk to the incarcerated veterans.
15 So for people who might not work with the homeless
16 veterans day in and day out, you would be surprised
17 to learn that a large majority of them have felonies
18 in their background. And that felony prevents them
19 from working--

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] You
22 don't mean a large majority of veterans that are
23 homeless have a felony in their background?

24 CRAIG KARAWANA: I would say probably
25 close to half the number of the participants in our

homeless veterans program have a felony in their background. So you're talking-- [background comment] Yeah. And so just to cite one example, according to media reports in 2013, a total of 1,410 defendants in Brooklyn checked have you ever served in the military on their arrest intake form. A common story we hear at America Works is that I just got out of prison. We knew about the services that New York has to offer. Got on a bus and came to New York and now looking for employment. Um, recently, just to give you an idea of how work does assist. Work does assist people transitioning out of prison. America Works partners with Manhattan in a study on recidivism and job placement. One of the key findings is that training designed to place inmates in job significantly decreases the likelihood of ex-offenders with non-violent histories. Only 31% of non-violent offenders who received enhanced training were arrested during an 18 to 36--18 to 36-month period in which they were tracked. And this is compared to 50% of participants to received just standard training. We think a good way again to assist veterans who are in danger of becoming homeless is if the Department of Veterans--the

Department of Corrections tracked veterans transitioning out of the prison system, and then have them connected to some type of program that has a work component to it. You'll capture a lot of those veterans who will otherwise be in danger of becoming homeless from ever having to enter the system to begin with. Our work has obviously got a theme through my testimony today. We believe work is a primary contributor--the lack of work is a primary contributor to the--to veterans homelessness. Is not only a stable income necessary to survive, but we have found that once a person has a job other aspects of their life begin to fall into place--begin to fall into place. Work brings a sense of purpose, which is especially important to a veteran and the community. Thank you for your time and I give the remainder of my time to questions. (sic)

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Let's hear from the other two folks who have signed up to testify, and then we'll have a few questions at the end, right, Chair?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

DR. DAVID STIFFLER: Thank you, Chairman Ulrich, and members of the committee. Thanks for inviting me for me for my testimony from my organization today. My name is Dr. David Stiffler. I'm a Psychiatrist at the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic, which is at the NYU Langone Medical Center. I'm here today to provide testimony on behalf of the leadership and the staff at the Military Family Clinic. The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic at NYU was founded to provide high quality mental health and substance abuse treatment accessible to veterans, active duty service members and their families. The clinic is committed to removing any barriers to treatment and welcomes all military personnel regardless of their discharge status, time of service and deployment experience. Since inception in July of 2012, we've served of 700 veterans and their family members. Approximately one-quarter of the veterans suffer--who are treated suffer from diagnoses of PTSD. While homelessness is a significant problem in the United States, it's of particular concern to the veteran population that server our country. Within the homeless population we know that mental illness and

substance related disorders are a problem. For instance, it's been reported that in one population of homeless veterans, 45% experienced mental illness and 70% experienced drug or alcohol problems, rates that are much higher than the general population. The VA has reported that the presence of mental illness or a substance related disorder is the strongest predictor of becoming homeless after discharge from active duty. Across cities in the country it's been emphasized that improved ability to connect individuals with mental illness or substance related disorders to the care they need is necessary to decrease homelessness. While more recently there's been a drop in the number of homeless veterans in New York City, many veterans still remain at risk of homelessness partly due to untreated mental illness and substance related disorders. Furthermore, for those veterans that remain homeless, untreated mental illness and substance related disorders could be a barrier to securing stable housing. Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony here today.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And Ms. Peeler,
Latasha Peeler.

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

101

LATASHA PEELER: Good afternoon--

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [off mic] Yes, it's
on.

LATASHA PEELER: Okay. Good afternoon,
Chairman Ulrich and Levin and the members of the City
Council. My name is Latasha Peeler, and I was once a
homeless veteran. From November, 2006 to May 2009, I
lived in shelters throughout New York City, from
drop-in, Homeless Safe Havens, veteran shelters and
even a couple of family shelters, and I also live on
the streets. My experiences include harassments from
clients and staff, males and females for both sexual
and emotional. False assumption of substance abuse I
was looked upon one day for wearing long sleeves, and
the first question, are you using? In that case, I
was not and have not used. I've experienced theft of
finance and personal property as well as
insensitivity from staff. Just because I'm homeless
doesn't mean I'm not a human being. In the spring of
2008 while residing in the Borden Avenue Veterans
Shelter, I was chosen to attend a meeting that
included members of DHS, the VA, NYCHA and other city
agencies to introduce the HUD VASH program. Months
later, I was introduced to a HUD VASH social worker

from Saint Albans. This started my process of ending my homelessness. While waiting for my voucher, I actively searched for apartments and even placed an ad on Craigslist, which resulted in the apartment that I do have, and have been in for the past 6-1/2 years. This apartment is located in Coney Island, Brooklyn. From the time that I applied for my voucher to the time I moved into my apartment it took six months, two of which was waiting for the approval of my voucher. Can New York city be--can be at Functional Zero by December 31st? In my opinion, no. The City is pushing veterans into apartments that they--that they may not be ready for, financially, emotionally and mentally without assessing the root causes of their homelessness: Mental health, substance abuse, and dependency, financial management and mismanagement and employment statuses. Also, veterans are having trouble with landlords and owners when it comes to their income sources. In some cases, the GI Bill and other educational income that comes from the VA is not accepted as a--as substantial income. Also those with low disability rating from the VA it makes harder for them to find a suitable apartment. Also, at the same time there are

utilities that veterans would have to contribute.

And also the vouchers for Section 8 are not--are
being turned away from--from landlords and not
considered sufficient payment or guaranteed payment.

In my opinion, to combat veteran homelessness, New
York City needs to invest in their veterans providing
certain services to improve current situations, and
prevent re-entry such as financial management and
investment, work ratings, plants such as the DOE
(sic) Fund, and their Ready, Willing and Able
Program. Required detox and substance abuse
treatment and counseling with the city agencies and
companies that provide temporary and permanent jobs
to vets as well as training opportunities. Provide
incentives to landlords and property owners that
house veterans or build affordable veteran housing.

Income--the income many homeless veterans receive
comes mostly from the VA for their disability and are
at low percentages. That makes it harder for them
to--to find and maintain housing. Veterans usually
do not--veterans usually feel more comfortable around
other veterans. That's why I feel it's best to get
or to create veteran's housing--veteran-only housing.

There are National Guard and Reserve veterans as well

as veterans with undesirable discharge statuses that do not qualify for the HUD VASH program or any other federal housing programs. As the gentleman stated earlier, there are veterans who have criminal records that prevent them from obtaining these vouchers whether it's federal or city. Expedient access to financial in time to [bell] other therapy outside-- outside of counseling and treatment such as gyms, fitness centers. There are hundreds of vacant factories and apartment buildings throughout New York City that could be renovated and turned into SRO lofts and studios for supportive housing. Provided city services to prevent loss of apartments and subsidies. At this moment, my disability--my disability rating was decreased from 30% to 20% and I am still looking for work so I can subsidize that. I also feel the shelter staff to do a better job in treating their clients. Please put yourself in your--please put yourself in the shoes of your clients, and try to understand what they go through daily and the scrutiny that they receive. Within the last years, I have submitted my ideas on how to improve the homelessness--to improve homelessness to members of DHS and MOVA, which apparently have fallen on deaf

ears. Because of my experience good and bad, I made it my mission to change the perception people have about the homeless and homeless veterans. Thank you for your time in allowing me to speak today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much for your testimony, and for your service to our country.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your courage. For someone in your position to come here and speak first hand about your experiences, is not something that we hear everyday or at every hearing, and I think some of the things that you had to say are the most meaningful things we heard today out of all the speakers. So, you are the last speaker, but you are certainly not the least in terms of importance, and we hear you. There is definitely a need to build veteran specific housing, and some of the advocates that I've spoken with recently have said that one of the problems is that we don't have housing for veterans with families. That we have these single units. We have an abundance of these single units, but if a veteran is married and the husband wife are a same sex couple, and they have children, they can't rent a studio apartment no

1 matter how affordable it is. It's just not livable
2 for them. So in looking at some of the housing
3 options that are available to them, there are several
4 hundred in particular that are on a waiting list
5 right now with HPD that we haven't quite found them
6 the right type of housing just yet. So, we need
7 stable affordable housing. I'm glad you brought up
8 the living conditions in the shelters, though. If we
9 had more time and perhaps if I was--if I was on time
10 myself today, I would have raised this with DHS
11 personally because last year I brought that up at the
12 hearing about some of the living conditions that were
13 described by a daily news article in one of the
14 veteran shelters. And I wanted to see if that
15 improved in anyway, or if the experience by residents
16 either on Borden Avenue or one of the other two
17 veteran specific shelters have improved in anyway.
18 And I know that your experience was last in 2008,
19 right? Was that the last time that you--?

21 LATASHA PEELER: Um, 2009.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: In 2009.

23 LATASHA PEELER: From November 1st, 2006
24 to May 19, 2009.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, last year there were several veterans who were interviewed by the Daily News who said that the reason why they prefer to sleep in the subways and the streets is that the shelter system that the city has set up for them, and the housing that's there is not safe or not clean, not sanitary. They talked about rats, roaches, mice, bed bugs, a host of issues that I wouldn't want to live there and you wouldn't want to live there. And so, you know, that's something that I think we have to work on, and Council Member Menchaca also asked me to bring this up. He had to leave for another hearing, but he said the living conditions in the current housing is really important, and that is also deterrent I think for veterans. I mean, wouldn't you agree?

LATASHA PEELER: Um, completely. The one thing that--that also needs to be addressed, um, in the drop-in centers, people are sleeping chairs, plastic metal chairs. In the drop-in center in Staten Island, they are sleeping in recliners. It's like the first come, first served. So most--so most people do not leave that facility because they do not want to leave--or they don't want to lose their beds.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, I mean there's a host of issues, and we're--we're going to follow up with a letter and Council Member Levin and I, the Chair of the General Welfare Committee, this is an issue that we're both very passionate about, and today was just the beginning of that conversation. Again, the numbers are debated in a lot of ways, but the substance is--is equally important. I think you agree so thank you all for testifying. Thank you again for being here, and everyone who came, the advocates and, of course, my co-chair and all the members who participated thank you again. Thank you. Go ahead, you can gavel that.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date November 15, 2015