

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  
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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  
Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Planning  
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Kristen Rouse  
New York City Veterans Alliance

Coco Culhane  
Veteran Advocacy Project  
Urban Justice Center

Peter Kempner, Director  
Veterans Justice Project  
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



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[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.

1  
2 Today is the day after Veteran's day, and  
3 a week in which we could come together to honor the  
4 men and women who have served our country, New York  
5 City's veterans and their families have much to  
6 celebrate. On Tuesday, the Council took an historic  
7 step and voted to establish a full Department of  
8 Veteran Services. However, this is just the  
9 beginning. There is still a lot work remaining to  
10 deliver our veterans the resources they deserve. One  
11 of the biggest challenges we face is ending veteran  
12 homelessness both here, in New York City and around  
13 the country. The city took a critical step when  
14 Mayor de Blasio signed onto the Obama  
15 Administration's, the Mayor's Challenge to end  
16 veterans homelessness pledging that New York City  
17 would eliminate homelessness among veterans by the  
18 end of 2015. In his State of the City speech this  
19 year, the Mayor declared: We commit to ending  
20 chronic homelessness among veterans this year.  
21 However, we also know that homelessness in the city  
22 is at a record high. We know that our homeless  
23 including our veterans are placed too often into  
24 substandard shelters to live in shameful conditions.  
25 Today, we receive an update from MOVA and the

1  
2 Department of Homeless Services on the progress the  
3 city is making in achieving its goal of ending  
4 veteran homelessness by the end of this year. We  
5 also expect to hear how the Administration plans to  
6 ensure that no veteran falls into a state of chronic  
7 homelessness or is forced to live in degrading  
8 conditions. No one who served and sacrificed for our  
9 nation should ever find themselves and their families  
10 without a permanent and respectable place to call  
11 home. I'd like to thank Council Members Levin, Chair  
12 of the General Welfare Committee and members of our  
13 Veterans Committee for joining us today. I'd like to  
14 thank our Veterans Committee staff Eric Bernstein,  
15 Michael Kurtz, and John Russell, as well as the staff  
16 of the General Welfare Committee Andrea Vasquez,  
17 Tonya Cyrus, Dohini Sompura for help us today putting  
18 the hearing together.

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

1  
2 Stephen Levin, Chair of the Council's Committee on  
3 General Welfare. Last year, the Committees on  
4 Veterans Affairs and General Welfare held a similar  
5 joint hearing on the City's efforts to end  
6 homelessness among veterans. Once again, I am  
7 pleased to join Council Member Eric Ulrich who will  
8 be here shortly, Chair of the Veterans Committee, on  
9 this important topic. I want to thank Chair Vallone.  
10 I want to thank everybody who has come today to  
11 testify, especially veterans. Although we spent  
12 yesterday celebrating and acknowledging the  
13 contributions of our veterans, we know that  
14 homelessness among our veterans is still a challenge  
15 that our city and our nation must overcome. And  
16 today, we are here to discuss the city's progress on  
17 ending veterans homelessness, and to learn whether  
18 the city is on track to achieve this goal by December  
19 31st, 2015, which is only seven weeks away from  
20 today.

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

1  
2 How man veterans are living on the streets? What is  
3 the plan to secure permanent housing for those  
4 remaining individuals. I'm also interested in  
5 learning what steps the de Blasio Administration has  
6 taken to ensure that every veteran in New York City  
7 is placed into permanent housing, that--and that  
8 supportive services are available especially to those  
9 who are suffering from disability, PTSD and other  
10 mental health issues. I am very appreciative of the  
11 Administration's hard work, and I now welcome  
12 testimony from General Loree Sutton, Commission of  
13 for now the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, and  
14 Commissioner Gilbert Taylor, Commissioner of the  
15 Department of Homeless Services. Before we begin, I  
16 will ask you to raise your right hand. Do you affirm  
17 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but  
18 the truth in your testimony before this Council, and  
19 to respond honestly to Council Member's questions?

20 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [off mic] I do.

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

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] I do.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

25 General. [pause] Please push the microphone button.

1  
2 There you go. You should have a red light. There  
3 you go.

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

1  
2 Administration with the capabilities that reflect the  
3 scale of our mission to serve the needs of over  
4 230,000 veterans and their families. I appreciate  
5 this clear demonstration of support and confidence  
6 from both the speaker and the Mayor as well as the  
7 City Council and the veteran advocate community. In  
8 particular Chairman Ulrich who will soon be here, and  
9 he shared with us his comments. I have told him  
10 already in person, and I will repeat it again today:  
11 I thank Chairman Ulrich so much as well as for  
12 members of the Committee on Veterans and the  
13 Committee on General Welfare for your stalwart  
14 support and leadership on behalf of those whom we are  
15 privileged to serve.

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

1  
2 sister agencies across city government and across the  
3 city who have partnered in unprecedented ways to end  
4 veteran homelessness.

5           By way of background, in June of 2014,  
6 First Lady Michelle Obama announced the Mayor's  
7 Challenge to end veteran homelessness. In response  
8 to the federal Mayor's Challenge, the New York City  
9 Continuum of Care formed a veterans taskforce  
10 bringing together multiple city agencies with veteran  
11 focused non-profits and launched Mission Home a city-  
12 based initiative to end veteran homelessness. In the  
13 2015 State of the City Address Mayor Bill de Blasio  
14 elevated this initiatives to an administration  
15 priority by joining the over 570 mayors, governors  
16 and local officials across the country committed to  
17 ending veteran homelessness in 2015. This made the  
18 city's commitment to Mission Home official and put  
19 New York City in the running to be the largest city  
20 in the country to meet this ambitious bold goal. To  
21 date, only a small number of cities across the  
22 country have met the goal of ending veteran  
23 homelessness this year including New Orleans, Phoenix  
24 and Salt Lake City. To date, Houston, a city of two  
25 million, is the largest city to achieve this goal.

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

16           With approximately 100 veterans entering  
17 the system each month in New York and an average  
18 period from the identification of a veteran entering  
19 the system, to achieving permanent housing placement,  
20 90 days meets the Functional Zero requirement in New  
21 York City and 300 homeless veterans represents the  
22 maximum number of veterans that we anticipate having  
23 in our system at any given time. The current status:  
24 When Mayor de Blasio first took office in January of  
25 2014, there were over 1,600 homeless men and women

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

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

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

1 attend weekly meetings with case managers and social  
2 workers who work with these clients, the veterans  
3 within their respective sites. DHS has triaged all  
4 veterans to a smaller number of shelters so that we  
5 could better serve them, and each week our staff  
6 identifies a new list of veterans at the shelters who  
7 are ready to move, and who would most benefit from  
8 having a veterans peer coordinator assigned to them.  
9 Our Veteran Peer Coordinators establish these  
10 essential peer-to-peer bonds with our homeless  
11 veterans and accompany them in close coordination  
12 with case workers, housing specialists and service  
13 providers to expedite placement, prevent recidivism,  
14 building resiliency and sustain the gains through  
15 coordinated after care and follow-up services.  
16

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

1  
2 needs and helps give our homeless veterans the  
3 support needed to safely and comfortably transition  
4 into permanent housing. To date, our Veteran Peer  
5 Coordinators have linked veterans to over 60  
6 apartments. MOVA is also working hand-in-hand with  
7 the Department of Homeless Services and our sister  
8 agencies on a day-to-day basis to place veterans in  
9 housing. We have formal meetings weekly between the  
10 senior staff from MOVA and DHS along with our  
11 colleagues at City Hall. And Commissioner Taylor and  
12 I also meet with the Mayor weekly to brief him on our  
13 progress to achieve the goal of ending veteran  
14 homelessness by the end of 2015. MOVA and DHS have  
15 instituted clear policies to hold all governmental  
16 and external stakeholders accountable. We now have a  
17 point person at each city agency who is involved in  
18 the process of housing a veteran who is available to  
19 address any and all questions or difficulties  
20 pertaining to individual cases and processes. For  
21 the first time ever, City Hall has instituted weekly  
22 interagency meetings to address red tape and clear  
23 any process barriers in the way of housing each  
24 homeless veteran. This meeting is followed by a  
25 weekly Mayor's briefing focused specifically on

1  
2 ending veteran homelessness. In addition to our work  
3 with our sister agencies, MOVA is and DHS are  
4 actively managing a database of all known homeless  
5 veterans. Working with our VA partners to ensure  
6 that all veterans in the system are known to us and  
7 are being prioritized for services and housing  
8 resources. Our providers now report weekly for all  
9 DHS and VA funded shelters to track targets towards  
10 our overall goal. This work ensures that we account  
11 for every veteran in the system, and hold ourselves  
12 and our federal partners to our goals. With this  
13 database, we are able to individually reach out to  
14 every homeless veteran and veteran living on the  
15 street by name, offer them a permanent housing  
16 intervention, and conduct regular outreach to connect  
17 these veterans to housing. With this targeted  
18 outreach since the Mayor took office, the number of  
19 homeless--the number of homeless veterans living on  
20 the streets has dropped by 97% from 39 street  
21 homeless veterans to eight veterans. Correction.  
22 Has dropped by 97% from 329 to eight veterans.

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

1  
2 the past, landlords would often wait six to eight  
3 weeks for their leasing paperwork to be approved and  
4 apartments to be inspected. Agencies have now  
5 committed to expediting each process step for  
6 apartments linked to our veterans within 24 to 48  
7 hours of receipt. Further, even when a veteran was  
8 linked to an apartment and ready for leasing signing,  
9 they would often have to wait to be housed because  
10 their signing had not yet be scheduled. HRA has  
11 committed to scheduling all leas signings within 24  
12 hours. The agencies now share weekly reports of  
13 bottlenecks in specific veterans cases, and work  
14 immediately to address these delays. From apartment  
15 identification to move in, we have identified  
16 numerous points where we can reduce the turnaround  
17 time and streamline the process of placing veterans  
18 in apartments. In New York City one of the biggest  
19 obstacles we face in housing homeless veterans is  
20 housing supply. In addition to the general lack of  
21 affordable housing and record low vacancy rates in  
22 the city, we face the additional challenge of needing  
23 almost exclusively apartments for singles. To that  
24 end, MOVA is working aggressively to identify  
25 increased housing supply options in both the public

1  
2 and private sectors. The very first course of action  
3 for the new MOVA team was to develop and implement a  
4 housing supply plan that garners not only enough  
5 housing but a cross-section of housing to meet the  
6 varying needs of our homeless veterans. To this end,  
7 we are working with DHS and HRA to ensure that  
8 veterans with higher service needs get referred into  
9 supportive housing or receive VASH, the federal  
10 Section 8 program that is specific to veterans and  
11 provides them with case managers at their local VA.  
12 For all other veterans we are working hand-in-hand  
13 with HPD, HDC and NYCHA to identify vacancies and new  
14 lease-ups for veterans and their families.

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

1  
2 with small landlords. The Landlord Outreach Team  
3 their members are dedicated to proactively and  
4 relentlessly identifying and recruiting landlords to  
5 commit their vacancies to house homeless veterans.  
6 And are prioritizing veterans and veteran families  
7 for all apartments. Once this team gets a commitment  
8 from a landlord, they loop back with MOVA and the DH  
9 shelters to schedule an apartment viewing usually  
10 within 48 hours. This small but dedicated team is  
11 committed to finding up to 300 apartments for our  
12 homeless veterans.

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

1  
2 support and partnership with the VA and HUD. And the  
3 outpouring of assistance by the service providers,  
4 affordable housing developers, and staunch stalwart  
5 veteran and housing advocates who are working with us  
6 around the clock to make this goal reality. Thank  
7 you so much for this opportunity to testify today.  
8 Following Commissioner Taylor's testimony, we look  
9 forward to your questions, ideas, concerns and  
10 suggestions. Thank you.

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

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CABREAR: Ruben Wills.

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

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Oh, we can hear  
3 from Commissioner Taylor.

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

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

1 else. There are more than 200,000 veterans living in  
2 New York City, and we owe them our deepest gratitude.  
3 They do so much and ask for so little in return. At  
4 the very least ensuring that they are securely housed  
5 should be our nation's obligation to them, and the  
6 City is doing its part. In fact, I'm proud to say  
7 that since January of 2014, we have reduced the  
8 veteran street homeless population to eight, which  
9 was also referenced by my colleague. On March 28 of  
10 2014, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
11 launched the 25 Cities Initiative to end veterans  
12 homelessness by end of 2015. The initiative was  
13 designed to help communities with high concentrations  
14 of homeless veterans intensify and integrate their  
15 local efforts. New York City under the leadership of  
16 Mayor de Blasio signed on immediately, and we've been  
17 working tirelessly to meet this goal through an  
18 effort entitled Mission Home. New York City is  
19 striving to end veterans' homelessness for all  
20 veterans including those on the street and in  
21 shelter. The Mission Home campaign is focused on  
22 ending veterans' homelessness and aligning outreach  
23 services and resources to ensure that New York City's  
24 veterans receive the comprehensive assistance that  
25

1 they need to move into their own home. On Mission  
2 Home our mission is to ensure that every veteran has  
3 a home. Ending veterans' homelessness is a top  
4 priority for DHS and we are collaborating with the  
5 Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs, Housing  
6 Preservation and Development, New York City Housing  
7 Authority, HRA, as well as the U.S. Department of  
8 Veterans Affairs on every step of this journey. DHS  
9 and MOVA are in daily communications strategizing on  
10 ways to reduce the number of homeless veterans in our  
11 system, discussing individual cases and organizing  
12 new ways to maximize the number of veterans that we  
13 place into permanent housing. This partnership is  
14 crucial and presents--represents the City's  
15 collaborate--collaborative effort to end veterans  
16 homelessness. One of the results of this  
17 collaboration is recognizing that the best way for  
18 the city to help veterans was to bring veterans onto  
19 our team through an evidence based model that has  
20 been successful elsewhere. Veteran Peer Coordinators  
21 provide veterans with additional individualized  
22 support and assistance in their search for permanent  
23 housing. These are veterans who have successfully  
24 been integrated into society, and want to use their  
25

1  
2 experience to help other veterans who are  
3 experiencing hardship. They engage vets on ways in  
4 which to best interview for housing and apartments  
5 and jobs. They travel with them to appointments, and  
6 advocate specifically to potential landlords on their  
7 behalf. They receive extensive training on all of  
8 the various housing placements that the city offers  
9 in the ten veteran summits across the city. They  
10 work nights and weekends and do whatever it takes to  
11 make sure that veterans are placed. And just as  
12 importantly, they serve as a resource after placement  
13 to help the veteran reintegrate smoothly into their  
14 new home and community. For veterans who need extra  
15 clinical support, and are weary of leaving shelter,  
16 we've hired licensed social workers that can engage  
17 these individuals to help place them into housing  
18 that is more appropriate for their needs. Veterans  
19 who are experiencing homelessness, just like all  
20 homeless New Yorkers are impacted by economic forces  
21 that affect New York City and the economic inequality  
22 that we see everyday in our system. Low wages, lack  
23 of affordable housing, and the increased cost of  
24 living combined with social traumas of domestic  
25 violence and discord are causing many New Yorkers,

1 veterans included to find themselves in very  
2 difficult situations that no one should have to  
3 experience. Furthermore, in many cases veterans are  
4 burdened with the emotional scars brought on by the  
5 trauma related to combat, and even hand social  
6 services so that they can properly reintegrate into  
7 their home communities. The mental health challenges  
8 associated with this population can make it  
9 additionally challenging for them to find appropriate  
10 housing. This, we in the Administration are  
11 committed to taking this on head on, taking--tackling  
12 these issues head on, ensuring that all veterans of  
13 our city are connected to quality care services and  
14 resources, and most importantly for our purposes a  
15 home that they can call their own.  
16

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

1  
2 years we've been able to reduce the overall number of  
3 homeless veterans to 4,677 in 2011 to 847 to day, an  
4 80% decrease. This decrease is even more notable  
5 when you see that since January of 20--January 1st of  
6 2014 over 2,000 veterans have entered our shelter  
7 system. New York City differs from some of the other  
8 municipalities by having a Right to Shelter Mandate.  
9 So as we rapidly exit existing veterans by having a  
10 Right to Shelter Mandate--so as we rapidly exit  
11 existing veterans, new veterans enter the system. We  
12 are using every resource at our disposal to rapidly  
13 re-house these veterans and return them to the  
14 community, and we will ensure that even after all of  
15 our existing clients are housed, future veterans will  
16 be rapidly housed and will leave shelter within 90  
17 days. Prevention is the cornerstone of DHS' efforts  
18 across our system. We believe that shelter should  
19 must be a last resort, and have naturally extended  
20 this principle to our work with veterans. The most  
21 effective way to end veterans homelessness is to stop  
22 it before it begins. Our Home Base Prevention  
23 Program is nationally recognized, and has been proven  
24 to be 95% effective in helping those who are enrolled  
25 in the program to remain stably housed, and remain in

1  
2 their own community. In Fiscal Year 2016, DHS  
3 Prevention Services approved \$400,000 to implement  
4 homelessness prevention programs for veterans via  
5 Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council Home Base.  
6 This program is targeting 100 veterans in the  
7 community with shelter histories who are most at risk  
8 of homelessness. By creating a high-risk profile for  
9 these veterans who might re-enter the system, we can  
10 provide them with any help that they may need before  
11 their situation becomes dire. This preventive model  
12 enables them to--enables individuals to remain stably  
13 housed in their community. DHS has also approved  
14 \$500,000 to implement a rapid re-housing program to  
15 help veterans presenting for re-entry, or as new  
16 entrants into the shelter system. This new model is  
17 slightly different from our normal prevention  
18 measures as it targets veterans entering shelter with  
19 enhanced services. Rapid re-housing is a promising  
20 evidence informed and short-term practice model, and  
21 a key prevention service strategy to support ending  
22 veterans homelessness. The core practice includes  
23 housing identification, financial assistance for rent  
24 and moving costs and case management service. It is  
25 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

1  
2 dedicated staff at the Safe Haven he was able to move  
3 into permanent housing. Ian's story is a great  
4 example of how outreach workers can connect with  
5 unsheltered vets--unsheltered veterans, and begin to  
6 lead them down the path to permanency. DHS'  
7 commitment is to find permanent housing for all of  
8 the 847 veterans who are currently in our system, and  
9 rapidly re-house any new veterans who may need our  
10 help. Nearly 600 veterans currently have housing  
11 vouchers in hand, and are actively seeking housing.  
12 Of those with vouchers in hand approximately 300 are  
13 linked to specific apartments, or are currently in a  
14 leasing process. We are tracking every single  
15 veteran within our system, and have housing plans  
16 assigned to them based on their individualized needs.  
17 In the past year alone, we have placed 900 veterans  
18 into permanent housing. We are committed to using  
19 every program in our arsenal to ensure that veterans  
20 exit shelter and return to the community. However,  
21 as we have seen, it takes a true partnership between  
22 the public and private sectors to find homes for all  
23 homeless--for all the homeless in our system. We are  
24 thankful to all landlords in New York City who are  
25 performing acts of patriotism by renting apartments

1  
2 to veterans. To further encourage this partnership,  
3 the City has recently launched an online and print  
4 public awareness campaign recruiting New York City  
5 landlords to participate in the Mission Home Program.  
6 This additional outreach is needed as we do--as we do  
7 this work at a time when the affordable housing  
8 market has a vacancy rate of less than one percent.  
9 Even with subsidies, it is a challenge to find  
10 apartments. Not surprisingly, this is greatly  
11 limiting, and is a problem that is unique to New  
12 York. When compared to other cities where vacancy  
13 rates have far--are far more substantial. However,  
14 there are landlords who are giving back. One such  
15 landlord with whom we are successfully partnered is  
16 Christine from Staten Island. We were able to  
17 connect with Christine through the Small Landlord  
18 Campaign. Christine wanted to rent to a veteran, and  
19 was very excited when she was matched with Antonio,  
20 and she instantly knew that she wanted him as a  
21 tenant. In Christine's words Antonio was respectful,  
22 quiet and a pleasure to house. Now that Antonio is  
23 stably housed, he is working as an outreach counselor  
24 assisting other veterans. Christine has had such  
25 positive experience with Mission Home, and she is now

1 renting her second vacancy to another veteran. She  
2 says she feels blessed to be able to help veterans,  
3 and wants to work with us in the future, and we as a  
4 city are fortunate to have landlords such as  
5 Christine using their resources to help veterans who  
6 are in need. There are multiple ways that veterans  
7 within our system can access housing like the kind  
8 that Christine was able to offer. With the  
9 appropriate discharge stats in the military, veterans  
10 are able to access HUD VASH vouchers as well as  
11 supportive services for veteran's families. In the  
12 event that a veteran cannot access VA rental  
13 assistance programming, they have access to a variety  
14 of city rental assistance programs for homeless  
15 individuals that began in September of 2014. These  
16 programs are called Living in Communities or LINC.  
17 There are six targeted programs for rental assistance  
18 that veterans can access including offerings from  
19 Working Families, those who are chronically, veterans  
20 with a survivor or domestic violence in the  
21 household, seniors, working single adults, and single  
22 adults who may be able to rent rooms from a friend or  
23 a family member. In addition to the DHS Rental  
24 Assistance Programs, there are other rental  
25

1  
2 assistance offerings that are available to all  
3 veterans. These include City Thefts--City SEPS,  
4 NYCHA, HPD and NYCHA Section 8 Housing, Supportive  
5 Housing Units and MRT. Recognizing the unique status  
6 of veterans, DHS has implemented several incentives  
7 to support these efforts so that landlords like  
8 Christine can be appropriately compensated for their  
9 willingness to partner with the city. We've created  
10 many incentive programs to help find housing  
11 placements for veterans including a 15% broker bonus  
12 that will be paid for successfully placed veterans;  
13 cash incentives for landlords for every apartment and  
14 commercial rental(sic) with a one-year lease that's  
15 signed with a homeless veteran; and bonuses to  
16 supportive housing providers for each unit that they  
17 rent to a veteran with a voucher. In addition, all  
18 veterans who are housed received comprehensive  
19 services to Supportive Services For Veteran's  
20 Families, SSVF, to ensure that even after they are  
21 placed into permanent housing that they can still  
22 access services to keep them stably housed. And if  
23 for some reason a veteran is not eligible for SSVF  
24 services, Samaritan Village, one of our non-profit  
25 providers through a grant from the Robin Hood

1  
2 Foundature--Foundation provides the same services at  
3 no cost to the participant. This means landlords  
4 like Christine will continue to work with the city  
5 and clients like Antonio can stay stably housed.  
6 This administration deeply cares about all veterans,  
7 and has made a powerful commitment to provide them  
8 with services they need including housing. DHS is  
9 working very closely with MOVA and various non-  
10 profits across the city to ensure that no veteran has  
11 to experience homelessness for any prolonged period  
12 of time. We will continue to strive a city in which  
13 veterans' homelessness is a relic of another era.  
14 Thank you, and we stand ready to take your questions.

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

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

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.

1  
2 If there is someone that you know of, I can assure  
3 you that we want to know about him or her. I will  
4 just give you an anecdote of one of our most renowned  
5 homeless veterans. Actually, today in about 40  
6 minutes Thomas Wagner also known as Cadillac is  
7 picking up the paperwork for his new apartment in  
8 Astoria. Cadillac, a veteran, the author of A Land  
9 of Lost Souls, a story about his previous experiences  
10 living on the streets of New York, and the  
11 inspiration of Richard Gere's recent film on  
12 homelessness became homeless again, and was living on  
13 the streets of Astoria in Queens. Working hand-in-  
14 hand with SUS, HANAC, and the Supportive Housing  
15 Network we were able to find Cadillac an apartment in  
16 the neighborhood that he calls home. I cite that as  
17 one such example. We are working this street  
18 homeless list just as we are with the shelter  
19 homeless list, name by name. This is very personal.  
20 This is all about relationships. So I will say it  
21 again today: If anyone here knows of a veteran who  
22 is living on the streets of our great city, please  
23 let us know who that veteran is. And if we do not  
24 have him or her already on our list, we will add  
25 them. Thank you, Chairman Levin.

1  
2                   COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So just to add,  
3 Street Outreach is administered is DHS by multiple  
4 non-profit providers, and the first part of their  
5 work is to actually get identifying information for  
6 our clients who are on the street. Once they have  
7 that identifying information, then they are able to  
8 use it to cross-track veteran status. If an  
9 individual self--self-discloses and says they're a  
10 veteran, we take them for their word, but we also  
11 check with VA to get a sense of whether they served.  
12 And we've found people who have reported being  
13 veterans who have not served in the military. We  
14 also found people who have not disclosed their  
15 veteran status who did serve in the military. And so  
16 we have a fairly good gauge in terms of knowing the  
17 veteran status of our street homeless clients. For  
18 all intents and purposes, our street--our street  
19 staff, our street caseworkers they are out there,  
20 right? They know who their clients are and they're  
21 out there everyday, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.  
22 We have teams on--on call at all hours of the night.  
23 They have clients who are on caseload, and they're  
24 looking very granularly at every individual that  
25 we're working with, and trying to get a sense of who

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

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?

25

1  
2                   COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So we go to them,  
3 right. We know that the drivers for street  
4 homelessness and subway homelessness tend to be tend  
5 to be untreated mental illness, and substance abuse  
6 for this population and for other populations. Um,  
7 our street homeless staff are mobile, and the  
8 expectation is they literally everyday go out. They-  
9 -they canvass the streets, and if they identify  
10 people who they believe are unsheltered, they will  
11 engage those individuals and they will ask them  
12 questions related to their housing status and their  
13 housing need. If a--if the person that they're  
14 engaging is unable to communicate with them, or  
15 unwilling to communicate with them, they go back,  
16 right. And so they keep going back, and they will  
17 keep going back to the extent that they can find the  
18 individual and continue to try to engage the  
19 individual. And so it takes quite a bit of time to  
20 engage someone who's living on the streets to--to get  
21 them into housing. But that continued outreach, and  
22 that continued fortitude in terms of asking the  
23 questions and making, and establishing really a  
24 relationship with the individuals so that they would  
25 trust them in giving them information is what helps

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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?

1  
2           COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Well, these eight  
3 are very resistant in terms of not wanting to come  
4 in, right?

5           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

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

10          CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

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

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

23          COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Uh-huh.

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

1  
2 their--the first step is that they're--they're, um,  
3 given a bed in one of the two veteran's shelters. Is  
4 that right, or are they going to another single adult  
5 shelter in the system?

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

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Directly, not--

12 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing]  
13 Directly

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

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

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

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

1  
2 to--to match the need, but we are opening up 500 more  
3 Safe Haven beds. Um, you know, anticipating the need  
4 for this winter. So that will help us tremendously.  
5 So it's a mix and there are some clients that we've  
6 been able to engage to move right from the street  
7 straight into shelter, straight to permanent housing.  
8 Others who bypass that stuff at the shelter, and go  
9 straight to housing. It depends upon where the  
10 client is in terms of their housing readiness, and  
11 also in terms of their ability to stabilize and to  
12 receive the housing resources that we can provide.  
13 Our perfect goal, though, would be to move a client  
14 from the street to housing, and then to support them  
15 with after care services so that they're housed and  
16 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  
2 today. Um, can they--is there a spot for them at  
3 those two shelters? Is there anything?

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

1 on the street, but they're not--and they're not in  
2 the shelter system but they're not--they're not, you  
3 know they're--they're kind of--I--I encountered an  
4 individual who some days who is--if it was warm  
5 enough he would sleep outside. If--if it was--you  
6 know, if he was able to find a couch to crash on, he  
7 would sleep on the couch.  
8

9 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Uh-huh.

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

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

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

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

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

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

1  
2 those individuals for that population that you're  
3 describing there's another resource that I would  
4 welcome, um, that I would offer and that would  
5 actually be Home Base. So it would actually be our  
6 prevention measures because anyone who has an ability  
7 to stay stably housed, um, if it's a housing  
8 situation that's safe, if it's a housing situation  
9 that can be maintained, we will support that  
10 individual to keep that situation.

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

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

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

21 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: --best track them  
22 to housing placement to the extent that one can be  
23 identified as opposed to having that individual have  
24 to make the stop into shelter. So again, it's really  
25 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

1  
2 a three-year study and investing about \$60,000 we now  
3 know the Dominicans who fought in World War II. Um,  
4 there's about 300 of them. Um, a couple of them,  
5 believe it or not, they're alive. One of them was  
6 one of Tuskegee men. Um, there's so much history.  
7 It's very rich, um, and the sedition is still going  
8 on in the Dominican Institute. I also, Commissioner,  
9 I wanted to commend you for the Opening Doors that  
10 you're having in collaboration with churches to be  
11 able to house, um, the homeless, and I mean to--My  
12 first question is directed to that. Would that be  
13 like a suitable place for veterans to go? Or do--is  
14 there another pathway, um, if one of the veterans--  
15 let's say if they feel comfortable going in a church  
16 where you have this situation, this situation that  
17 you're creating.

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

1  
2 partnerships with many houses of worship to help us  
3 to get to our goal of 500 beds. Right now we have  
4 436 beds that are committed.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: All right.

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

1 because it actually does work. Um, and it is in all  
2 five boroughs, and I can make sure that anyone who  
3 wants information about it can have it, and we have  
4 special modality for veterans now in our Home Base  
5 programming as well.  
6

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

20 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: A racial breakdown?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes.

22 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, I have  
23 ethnicity.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

25 [background comments]

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

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

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

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

19           COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: 16, 1-6? Okay.  
20 Um, and my last question is in regards-in--in terms  
21 of count--county. So a homeless veteran goes in.  
22 Um, he's taken of the list of those who are homeless.  
23 How many end up of those who go in, end up coming  
24 out? You know, they go in like in a revolving kind  
25

1  
2 of cycle door, and kind of reflect. (sic) Do you  
3 happen to have those numbers?

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

24                   COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: All right.

1  
2                   COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: But looking at  
3 those categories to answer your question about the  
4 churn or about the turnover in movement, it tends to  
5 be more pronounced on the single side, right? And so  
6 single individuals tend to come and go more  
7 frequently across our system, and it's not unique to  
8 veterans. Um, not so much for families with  
9 children. Because they have young children in the  
10 household, they stay, you know, in place, and the  
11 same is true for adult families. Um, but for  
12 veterans who may leave the system, um, typically they  
13 will leave for a very short period of time, and  
14 they'll come back. And so, we know who they are, and  
15 that when they return we have an opportunity to re-  
16 engage them around, um, what could be a potential  
17 housing resource if there was one, right. And so, if  
18 someone had left to go visit a relative, the question  
19 we would ask would be is that relative someone that  
20 we could perhaps, um, work with you to identify a  
21 potential housing situation with? But for all three  
22 groups, it's really the--the singles that have more  
23 of a churn than we--than the families, um, population  
24 in our system.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So that--the  
3 number that you gave us today of eight of them being  
4 homeless in the street--

5 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing] Uh-  
6 huh.

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

10 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing]  
11 Correct.

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

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

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

1

2

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing] Uh-

3

huh.

4

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

7

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: [interposing] Uh-

8

huh.

9

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

10

11

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

12

13

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]

14

And my point are they considered?

15

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?

16

17

18

19

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

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 here. I'm not--you know, I'm not housed. So that  
2 then gets you onto our caseload.  
3

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Got you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: That is of today.

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

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

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

1  
2           COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: No there are 191  
3 veterans who are in shelter with the Veterans  
4 Administration in their shelters.

5           COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: The VA shelters?

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

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

10          COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: They are.

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

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

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

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

1  
2 and I believe Borden is a mixed gender. It's mixed  
3 gender. It's men and women.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: 28.

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

7 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay. [laughter]

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

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

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

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

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

1  
2 over the winter as you've identified a very small  
3 group?

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

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

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

5 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Um, so the goal--  
6 when we--when we achieve our Functional Zero, our  
7 goal is to house all veterans within a 90-day period.  
8 I'm trying to get a sense of what the average length  
9 of stay is for veterans currently in our system if it  
10 is on here. I see it. Um, and thus far in the past  
11 four years--so this is over a four-year period--it  
12 has been much longer than that. It has actually been  
13 303 days for veterans.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay.

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

1  
2 unit that they need to move into? What, if any, are  
3 the systemic barriers that are preventing them from  
4 moving in as quickly as possible? Aligning a date  
5 for them to actually move by. We have someone  
6 working with vets, specific veteran who is not in  
7 that room, telling the veteran you have this  
8 resource. This is the place that we want to identify  
9 for you to go view. We want to make sure that you're  
10 ready to move. What do you need from us? At this  
11 juncture, it is truly--um, it is a machine. I mean  
12 we are--we are truly across agencies, um, rolling up  
13 our sleeves and thus working this everyday, um,  
14 including weekends, including nights and just really  
15 driving towards our goal.

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

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

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

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

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very  
12 much.

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

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

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

3  
4 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Do you have by  
5 gender with you? How many are women?

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

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

16 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So it's actually a  
17 mix.

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

23 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So they make up the  
24 5% out of the homeless population that we see now in  
25 the shelter system.

1  
2                   COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So I want to make  
3 sure that we give you the number.

4                   COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Okay.

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

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

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

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So it's the same--  
3 the same subsidies that any other homeless person  
4 qualifies for just that you're prioritizing veterans?

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

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

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

1  
2 as overcoming some of the distress associated with  
3 city rental assistance programs with the end of  
4 Advantage. Um, we have--we continue to see our  
5 programs being accepted by a large number of  
6 landlords throughout the city. We are very fortunate  
7 to have largely brokers who have been very helpful in  
8 marketing our programs to landlords and connecting  
9 our clients to available units. And so, for this  
10 population, you know, clients are renting rooms.  
11 Clients are renting apartments. You know, it depends  
12 upon what housing situation they are looking for.  
13 Some clients are going to supportive housing. Some  
14 clients are, um, reconnecting with family members and  
15 friends, and we have a subsidy for that as well. And  
16 so casting our net wide and thus making sure that  
17 we're being aggressive in marketing our programs that  
18 will hopefully yield more traction in terms of  
19 they're being accepted by landlords throughout the  
20 city. But we're much further along now than we had  
21 been before.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you so much.

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

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

4  
5 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Great. So I'll  
6 be quick. Thank you, Chairs. I appreciate it.  
7 Thank you, Commissioner, too, and your team. I  
8 really appreciate all the work that this  
9 administration is really doing to really recognize  
10 and acknowledge all the work veterans have been  
11 doing. I just want to give a shout out. The boy  
12 behind you, Melvin Romero, is a good friend of mine.  
13 I know him well, and the work he's been doing in the  
14 Bronx--the Bronx. I just wanted to ask a question.  
15 I've been very blessed because last week Urban  
16 Pathways opened a new residence for veterans on  
17 Boston Road and Community Board 3, and I also have an  
18 upcoming project being built by Services for the  
19 Underserved on Cliff Adams. (sic) So I'm very happy  
20 that we are recognizing that there is a lot of value  
21 in housing--permanent affordable housing for  
22 veterans. We don't do enough for veterans, but many  
23 of my community boards have really been crying about  
24 it. And some of the proposals we've been getting, we  
25 have been declining them, and now they have been

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

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

1  
2 sustainability, which does include more veteran  
3 specific developments like Urban Pathways. And like  
4 you, I was so excited to be there last week at the  
5 opening, and we're very excited about the  
6 opportunities, as well as the support from the Mayor,  
7 this administration, the City Council, and the--the  
8 community of brokers and developers who are here in  
9 New York that are excited to be part of this effort.  
10 You know, the Mayor hosted a roundtable a couple,  
11 maybe two or three weeks ago where, you know, some of  
12 the larger, um, brokers and landlords, and  
13 development companies were all there around the  
14 table. And it was amazing, you know, how many of  
15 them had parents who were veterans or relatives who  
16 in some cases were veterans themselves. And this is  
17 a tremendous, um, you know, storehouse of good will,  
18 and patriotism and recognition that supporting our  
19 veterans is not just the right thing to do. It's the  
20 smart thing to do, and as recently as this morning--  
21 I'm looking at Joe Bello now who is rubbing his eyes  
22 because he's a little bit tired from all that's been  
23 going on this last week. But we had the opportunity  
24 to sit down with Secretary McDonald, the Secretary of  
25 the VA, and we were there at Borden Shelter this

1  
2 morning, and Secretary McDonald was sharing with us  
3 as we were talking with some of the Borden Shelter  
4 residents as well as a whole group of folks that was  
5 there to be part of that conversation. Secretary  
6 McDonald highlighted that as he goes across the  
7 country the experience has been very much like we've  
8 experienced in--with many of our veterans and our  
9 landlords here in New York. But perhaps there may be  
10 a little resistance upfront, but once that landlords  
11 like Christine that Nicole mentioned and others, once  
12 they realize how veterans--you know, they show up.  
13 They clean up. They organize and they are very much  
14 vested in community. Very much the kind of community  
15 that Melvin is working to create with his work with  
16 Volunteers of America. Also, the kind of community  
17 for women veterans that we know are so important. So  
18 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.

1

2

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

3

4

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.

10

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COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Right.

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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

1  
2 the entire plan of housing and services for many of  
3 our vets. So, thank you, Council Member, again for  
4 your leadership.

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

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Mr. Chairman, if I  
17 could just add one other thing. What we didn't  
18 mention this afternoon is the vital role of 311. So  
19 for any of you, if you encounter not just a homeless  
20 veteran, but a homeless individual on the streets of  
21 New York, please call 311. The outreach team that  
22 Commissioner Taylor referenced is absolutely there  
23 24/7 to go engage with that individual, and to get  
24 them sheltered and get them what they need, and get  
25 their lives back on track. So again, it's another

1  
2 real resource and strength that our city has, and  
3 we'll continue to build on it. Thank you.

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

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

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you very  
12 much.

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

1  
2 you in. So, that's a--that's a good thing. Be  
3 careful. All right. So why don't we start with  
4 Kristin and we'll put the clock at five minutes for  
5 each speaker, and you may begin when you're ready.

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

1 done. Yesterday at the Mayor's Veterans Day  
2 Breakfast, it was heartening to hear the Mayor speak  
3 passionately about the successes of the city's effort  
4 to end homelessness just as we heard the  
5 Administration speak of today. He said for the  
6 remaining number of homeless veterans, we know each  
7 one of them, and that the city was continuing work to  
8 help them. This is indeed an accomplishment, and I  
9 applaud our city government for its tremendous work  
10 to help veterans remaining in the system. What I am  
11 here to point out, however, is that there are still  
12 veterans outside of the system who are homeless or at  
13 risk for homelessness, and we still do not know them.  
14 Just as there are far more individuals who are going  
15 hungry every night, they never apply for food stamps  
16 or other public assistance. We hear all the time  
17 about veterans who are not reaching out to the public  
18 system for assistance with their struggles to find or  
19 stay in a home. Veterans are resilient and  
20 resourceful individuals, and we hear often about  
21 cases where a veteran is couch surfing with friends,  
22 sleeping in the room of the workplace, or the  
23 National Guard Armory or hidden away on a rooftop, in  
24 a car or other hard to find places because they don't  
25

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

1 time, and I count myself among the lucky ones.  
2  
3 Younger veterans in particular at the ones most like  
4 to be outside of the existing system. They are  
5 detected surviving in the short-term with few  
6 resources and are not detected by routine  
7 homelessness counts or outreach. They may be facing  
8 poverty for the first time, and find themselves  
9 alienated by shelters that may expose them to drug  
10 use, recreate symptoms or recreate situations similar  
11 to those in which military sexual trauma occurs, or  
12 overwhelmingly aggravate symptoms of post-traumatic  
13 stress. Despite being highly capable individuals,  
14 some of these veterans are extremely vulnerable  
15 living on the edge spiraling further into poverty and  
16 illness. Bringing these men and women into programs  
17 that adapt to their needs requires creative efforts  
18 and additional funding. And that cause pales in  
19 comparison to what will be needed if they become  
20 chronically homeless. As we approach the end of  
21 2015, we can celebrate the great successes of ending  
22 homelessness for a truly remarkable number of  
23 veterans. But when the city talks about Functional  
24 Zero, we must take into account that the many  
25 veterans who still remain invisible to the system.

1  
2 And that younger veterans in particular who are  
3 contending with New York City's stark economic  
4 realities maybe at risk for homelessness on the near  
5 or long term. Veterans must be included in any city  
6 effort to provide affordable housing not just for the  
7 recently homeless, but to prevent veteran  
8 homelessness in the future. And to ensure that  
9 veterans haven't been left behind by the rest of New  
10 York City because of their military services. More  
11 must be put into place--must more be put into--  
12 must--more must be put into place to prevent veteran  
13 homelessness and to provide immediately--immediate  
14 help for those who are struggling right now to make  
15 ends meet. There must be more for veterans with  
16 families. There must be more places to go for  
17 veterans who have service animals. In short,  
18 resources to prevent and mitigate veteran  
19 homelessness must continue well beyond 2015. [bell]  
20 Recent successes are well worth celebrating, but New  
21 York City must further focus and refine the existing  
22 system to reach those still struggling in the margins  
23 and to ensure that more veterans do not end up in the  
24 system in the future. On behalf of the New York City  
25 Veterans Alliance, I thank you for the opportunity to

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

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

8 COCO CULHANE: Hi, I'm Coco Culhane from  
9 the Veteran Advocacy Project at the Urban Justice  
10 Center, and I'll skip most of my testimony. I think  
11 that Kristen has covered it, and some of the  
12 questions before covered it, but I'd like to  
13 highlight that there are so many veterans who are not  
14 a part of the DHS system. You know, as was stated  
15 before, they're couch surfing. They're sleeping in  
16 their cars. Um, and I think that we need to  
17 absolutely celebrate the success and how much  
18 progress the city has made. But keep in mind that  
19 Functional Zero is a dangerous term I think, and  
20 signals to the public that, you know, we've  
21 accomplished something and we're set, and the tax  
22 dollars solved it, and we can move on when that's not  
23 true at all. And I just want to say, you know, I  
24 know that our client database has the names of men  
25 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  
2 nationwide into--into three programs. There's the  
3 SSVF Program, the Grants and Per Diem Program and the  
4 HUD VASH Section 8. SSVF Supportive Services for  
5 families, this money is meant to on one-half do a  
6 veteran prevention work to pay rent arrears for  
7 veterans who are facing non-payment of rent cases.  
8 And the other half is used for the Rapid Re-Housing  
9 of veterans who are currently homeless, and getting  
10 them into permanent housing. Grants and Per Diem  
11 provides funding to house veterans in supportive  
12 housing programs instead of traditional shelters.  
13 And lastly, there's the HUD VASH Section 8 program,  
14 and really, this is the most important program we're  
15 looking at in terms of the sustainability of dealing  
16 with veteran homelessness because this greatly  
17 expands the number of Section 8 vouchers that are  
18 available to homeless veterans, you know. And then,  
19 they only have to pay 30% of their income as their  
20 share of the rent. And this makes permanent housing  
21 sustainable for them. But I think as mentioned  
22 before unfortunately really in order to qualify for a  
23 Section 8 voucher here in New York City you--you have  
24 to go into the shelter system. And so, what we're  
25 looking at is people--veterans having to become

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

1  
2 disability rating only get \$836 a month. 60%  
3 disability rating you only get \$1,059 a month.  
4 Again, this is not enough to find housing in New York  
5 City. It's not until you get to the 90 or 100%  
6 disability rating that they receive significant  
7 enough income to find housing, and even then it's  
8 difficult. 90% you get \$1,743 a month, and only at  
9 100% do you get \$2,906 a month, and that's a point at  
10 which it is--it is possible to find safe and  
11 affordable housing. But really those other disabled  
12 veterans who have no other source of income cannot  
13 find safe and affordable housing in New York City.  
14 Many of the members of both of the committees holding  
15 this hearing today have co-sponsored legislation,  
16 which would address this very issue, and which would  
17 be revolutionary frankly in fighting veteran  
18 homelessness in New York City. Introduction 792  
19 would require that New York City provide rental  
20 assistance to disabled veterans receive a 50% or  
21 above disability rating or who receive VA pension so  
22 long as their total income falls below 200% of the  
23 poverty level, and so long as the housing they find  
24 is within the fair market rent amount set by HUD,  
25 which is the same standard that's being used for the

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

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

17 PETER KEMPNER: Yes.

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

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

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

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For SSD.

11 PETER KEMPNER: Yes. for SSD or SSI.

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

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

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

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

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

3 PETER KEMPNER: Absolutely not.

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

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

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No COLA?

13 PETER KEMPNER: No COLA.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We want to take  
16 testimony here.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry. I'm sorry.

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

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

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

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank.

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

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

1  
2 supportive housing, rapid re-housing and homelessness  
3 prevention to targeted employment and income  
4 enhancement services. Jericho opened Fordham Village  
5 in 2011 and Kings Bridge Terrace in 2012. Both are  
6 state-of-the art LEED Certified veteran residences in  
7 the Bronx, which together serves 132 male and female  
8 veterans from all areas. Additionally, in June 2015,  
9 Jericho began construction on its third supportive  
10 housing residence with veterans in the Bronx, Walton  
11 Avenue, which will be home to 56 veterans. The de  
12 Blasio Administration has made an unprecedented  
13 commitment to ending veteran's homelessness, and is  
14 working closely with advocates like the Jericho  
15 Project to provide our veterans with the quality  
16 housing, stability and supports they deserve.  
17 Jericho Project supports and is appreciative of the  
18 Mayor's leadership and efforts to end veteran--end  
19 homelessness among veterans. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, and just  
21 a side note, the City Council appropriated several  
22 weeks ago a small, but hopefully a meaningful grant  
23 for the organization, and I think it was in amount of  
24 \$50,000 as part of the Veterans Initiative. So  
25 \$50,000 went to--went to your group, and we hope that

1  
2 you will explore and find other housing options for  
3 veterans. I know Councilman Levin had a few  
4 comments, and then I'll call the next panel.

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

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

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Sorry.

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

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

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

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

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

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

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

1  
2 avenues. We've made ADA requests, um, through DHS.  
3 We haven't had much luck so far?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COCO CULHANE: I could not answer that.

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

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

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

1 we'll just discuss what we've seen in the homeless  
2 veterans of the community, and just some of the our  
3 ideas of how the City can improve services for  
4 homeless veterans. We believe there should be a work  
5 component to any program designed to assist homeless  
6 veterans. The official number of homeless veterans  
7 that will be discussed today no the street is  
8 decreasing. But too often we feel we're just talking  
9 about sheltering veterans when in reality they're  
10 still dependent upon government and social services  
11 organizations for their livelihood. So, many of the  
12 veterans we see come to us, of course, not just  
13 through word of mouth, but through the HRA and other  
14 social service organizations, the VA and their  
15 livelihood is still dependent on these organizations  
16 and we feel the reason is that a lot of these  
17 programs don't have a work component to that. And  
18 only related to work will they start to have a source  
19 of income and, of course, stabilize their life, and  
20 then really begin to integrate back into society.  
21 And once they are self-sufficient, then we should no  
22 longer consider them homeless. America Works  
23 welcomes in the Department of Veterans Services and  
24 we feel the way work can be integrated into these  
25

1  
2 programs is for this new department to be able to  
3 issue paper performance contracting to different  
4 organizations with the work component tied to it. So  
5 this way we can have a city agency be responsible for  
6 veterans employment, and this will have--these  
7 programs will have metrics and goals that will be  
8 tied to funding so that we'll know how well we're all  
9 doing our job of actually getting veterans employed.  
10 And once we do this, we could, you know, truly end  
11 veterans homelessness, and have our veterans who are  
12 either homeless or in danger of becoming homeless  
13 tied to a job. And once again, leading to our point  
14 of they'll be self-sufficient. And on the last note,  
15 I'll just like to talk to the incarcerated veterans.  
16 So for people who might not work with the homeless  
17 veterans day in and day out, you would be surprised  
18 to learn that a large majority of them have felonies  
19 in their background. And that felony prevents them  
20 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

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

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

20 [background comments]

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

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.

1  
2 DR. DAVID STIFFLER: Thank you, Chairman  
3 Ulrich, and members of the committee. Thanks for  
4 inviting me for me for my testimony from my  
5 organization today. My name is Dr. David Stiffler.  
6 I'm a Psychiatrist at the Steven and Alexandra Cohen  
7 Military Family Clinic, which is at the NYU Langone  
8 Medical Center. I'm here today to provide testimony  
9 on behalf of the leadership and the staff at the  
10 Military Family Clinic. The Steven and Alexandra  
11 Cohen Military Family Clinic at NYU was founded to  
12 provide high quality mental health and substance  
13 abuse treatment accessible to veterans, active duty  
14 service members and their families. The clinic is  
15 committed to removing any barriers to treatment and  
16 welcomes all military personnel regardless of their  
17 discharge status, time of service and deployment  
18 experience. Since inception in July of 2012, we've  
19 served of 700 veterans and their family members.  
20 Approximately one-quarter of the veterans suffer--who  
21 are treated suffer from diagnoses of PTSD. While  
22 homelessness is a significant problem in the Unite  
23 States, it's of particular concern to the veteran  
24 population that server our country. Within the  
25 homeless population we know that mental illness and

1  
2 substance related disorders are a problem. For  
3 instance, it's been reported that in one population  
4 of homeless veterans, 45% experienced mental illness  
5 and 70% experienced drug or alcohol problems, rates  
6 that are much higher than the general population.  
7 The VA has reported that the presence of mental  
8 illness or a substance related disorder is the  
9 strongest predictor of becoming homeless after  
10 discharge from active duty. Across cities in the  
11 country it's been emphasized that improved ability to  
12 connect individuals with mental illness or substance  
13 related disorders to the care they need is necessary  
14 to decrease homelessness. While more recently  
15 there's been a drop in the number of homeless  
16 veterans in New York City, many veterans still remain  
17 at risk of homelessness partly due to untreated  
18 mental illness and substance related disorders.  
19 Furthermore, for those veterans that remain homeless,  
20 untreated mental illness and substance related  
21 disorders could be a barrier to securing stable  
22 housing. Thank you for the opportunity to present my  
23 testimony here today.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And Ms. Peeler,  
25 Latasha Peeler.

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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 don  
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

1 from Saint Albans. This started my process of ending  
2 my homelessness. While waiting for my voucher, I  
3 actively searched for apartments and even placed an  
4 ad on Craigslist, which resulted in the apartment  
5 that I do have, and have been in for the past 6-1/2  
6 years. This apartment is located in Coney Island,  
7 Brooklyn. From the time that I applied for my  
8 voucher to the time I moved into my apartment it took  
9 six months, two of which was waiting for the approval  
10 of my voucher. Can New York city be--can be at  
11 Functional Zero by December 31st? In my opinion, no.  
12 The City is pushing veterans into apartments that  
13 they--that they may not be ready for, financially,  
14 emotionally and mentally without assessing the root  
15 causes of their homelessness: Mental health,  
16 substance abuse, and dependency, financial management  
17 and mismanagement and employment statuses. Also,  
18 veterans are having trouble with landlords and owners  
19 when it comes to their income sources. In some  
20 cases, the GI Bill and other educational income that  
21 comes from the VA is not accepted as a--as  
22 substantial income. Also those with low disability  
23 rating from the VA it makes harder for them to find a  
24 suitable apartment. Also, at the same time there are  
25

1  
2 utilities that veterans would have to contribute.  
3 And also the vouchers for Section 8 are not--are  
4 being turned away from--from landlords and not  
5 considered sufficient payment or guaranteed payment.  
6 In my opinion, to combat veteran homelessness, New  
7 York City needs to invest in their veterans providing  
8 certain services to improve current situations, and  
9 prevent re-entry such as financial management and  
10 investment, work ratings, plants such as the DOE  
11 (sic) Fund, and their Ready, Willing and Able  
12 Program. Required detox and substance abuse  
13 treatment and counseling with the city agencies and  
14 companies that provide temporary and permanent jobs  
15 to vets as well as training opportunities. Provide  
16 incentives to landlords and property owners that  
17 house veterans or build affordable veteran housing.  
18 Income--the income many homeless veterans receive  
19 comes mostly from the VA for their disability and are  
20 at low percentages. That makes it harder for them  
21 to--to find and maintain housing. Veterans usually  
22 do not--veterans usually feel more comfortable around  
23 other veterans. That's why I feel it's best to get  
24 or to create veteran's housing--veteran-only housing.  
25 There are National Guard and Reserve veterans as well

1  
2 as veterans with undesirable discharge statuses that  
3 do not qualify for the HUD VASH program or any other  
4 federal housing programs. As the gentleman stated  
5 earlier, there are veterans who have criminal records  
6 that prevent them from obtaining these vouchers  
7 whether it's federal or city. Expedient access to  
8 financial in time to [bell] other therapy outside--  
9 outside of counseling and treatment such as gyms,  
10 fitness centers. There are hundreds of vacant  
11 factories and apartment buildings throughout New York  
12 City that could be renovated and turned into SRO  
13 lofts and studios for supportive housing. Provided  
14 city services to prevent loss of apartments and  
15 subsidies. At this moment, my disability--my  
16 disability rating was decreased from 30% to 20% and I  
17 am still looking for work so I can subsidize that. I  
18 also feel the shelter staff to do a better job in  
19 treating their clients. Please put yourself in your--  
20 -please put yourself in the shoes of your clients,  
21 and try to understand what they go through daily and  
22 the scrutiny that they receive. Within the last  
23 years, I have submitted my ideas on how to improve  
24 the homelessness--to improve homelessness to members  
25 of DHS and MOVA, which apparently have fallen on deaf

1 ears. Because of my experience good and bad, I made  
2 it my mission to change the perception people have  
3 about the homeless and homeless veterans. Thank you  
4 for your time in allowing me to speak today.  
5

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

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

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2 matter how affordable it is. It's just not livable  
3 for them. So in looking at some of the housing  
4 options that are available to them, there are several  
5 hundred in particular that are on a waiting list  
6 right now with HPD that we haven't quite found them  
7 the right type of housing just yet. So, we need  
8 stable affordable housing. I'm glad you brought up  
9 the living conditions in the shelters, though. If we  
10 had more time and perhaps if I was--if I was on time  
11 myself today, I would have raised this with DHS  
12 personally because last year I brought that up at the  
13 hearing about some of the living conditions that were  
14 described by a daily news article in one of the  
15 veteran shelters. And I wanted to see if that  
16 improved in anyway, or if the experience by residents  
17 either on Borden Avenue or one of the other two  
18 veteran specific shelters have improved in anyway.  
19 And I know that your experience was last in 2008,  
20 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.

25

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

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

1  
2                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, I mean there's  
3 a host of issues, and we're--we're going to follow up  
4 with a letter and Council Member Levin and I, the  
5 Chair of the General Welfare Committee, this is an  
6 issue that we're both very passionate about, and  
7 today was just the beginning of that conversation.  
8 Again, the numbers are debated in a lot of ways, but  
9 the substance is--is equally important. I think you  
10 agree so thank you all for testifying. Thank you  
11 again for being here, and everyone who came, the  
12 advocates and, of course, my co-chair and all the  
13 members who participated thank you again. Thank  
14 you. Go ahead, you can gavel that.

15                   [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date November 15, 2015