

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS  
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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October 27, 2009  
Start: 1:18 pm  
Recess: 2:53 pm

HELD AT:                   Committee Room  
                                  City Hall

B E F O R E:

JAMES SANDERS, JR.  
Chairperson

CHARLES BARRON  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

James Sanders, Jr.  
Charles Barron  
Tony Avella  
Gale A. Brewer  
Darlene Mealy  
Larry B. Seabrook  
Eric Ulrich  
Letitia James  
Lewis A. Fidler

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Andrew Roberts  
Deputy Director  
New York State Division of Veterans Affairs

Wilfred Cotto  
Coordinator for Veterans Affairs  
City University of New York

Peter Jordan  
Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs  
City University of New York

Aubrey Arcangel  
Junior  
City College of New York

August Coleman  
Freshman  
Hostos Community College

Eric Glaude  
Veterans Coordinator  
Borough of Manhattan Community College

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2 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: This hearing  
3 will now come to order. Good afternoon. My name  
4 is Councilman James Sanders Jr., and I am the  
5 Chair of this very worthy committee, going over  
6 something very important to all of us up here.  
7 This is a committee hearing that we're doing  
8 jointly with the Chair of Higher Education. I'm  
9 going to stop for a second and let him introduce  
10 himself and introduce the people up here, and then  
11 I can go into a statement.

12 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I'm Council  
13 Member Charles Barron, Chair of the Higher  
14 Education Committee. I want the record to read  
15 that Council Member Sanders placed the lawyer in  
16 between us because he didn't want to identify with  
17 me politically just in case the mayor is watching  
18 this hearing. Because usually the Chair sits next  
19 to the other Chair, so I want us to be educated on  
20 the politics of seating arrangements. With us is  
21 Council Member Darlene Mealy from Brooklyn,  
22 Council Member Tony Avella from Queens, Council  
23 Member Larry Seabrook was here from Brooklyn but  
24 the 92-year-old lady that was shot by a stray  
25 bullet was in his district, the grandmother, and

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2 he had to go and attend some very, very important  
3 business around that. Ms. Cyrus, the Policy  
4 Analyst and stand-in for the legal person until we  
5 get another legal counsel for our committee, makes  
6 us all appear smarter than what we really are  
7 because of her research. Council Member Letitia  
8 James is here as well.

9 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I also want  
10 to draw attention that this is Matthew Carlin who  
11 is our Legislative Attorney. This is his first  
12 time here doing this. We don't want you panicking  
13 him and scaring him and having him run off. It's  
14 too late? Oh well. I'm Council Member James  
15 Sanders Jr., and I'm the Chair of the Committee on  
16 Veterans. I'm also a veteran. I would like to  
17 take a moment to thank our men and women in  
18 uniform for their sacrifices on behalf of  
19 defending our country. Today's hearing which will  
20 be held jointly with the Higher Education  
21 Committee, Chaired by my colleague Council Member  
22 Charles Barron, will address recent reported  
23 delays in processing applications and of  
24 submitting payments to veterans attending school  
25 under the Post 9/11 GI Bill. The Post 9/11 GI

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2 Bill was signed into law in 2008 and fully  
3 implemented August 1, 2009. The United States  
4 Department of Veterans Affairs, or VA, as we call  
5 it, is charged with administering this program.  
6 It is reported that more than 275,000 applications  
7 for eligibility under this bill have been  
8 submitted to the VA. Unfortunately, it is also  
9 reported that the VA has not been able to keep up  
10 with the demand that has created a huge backlog of  
11 benefits not reaching veterans who are eligible.  
12 Some of these veterans are facing difficult  
13 choices such as not buying books, taking our  
14 personal loans and even dropping classes or school  
15 for that matter. The VA has acknowledged its role  
16 in this backlog and has attempted to issue  
17 emergency checks of up to \$3,000 to veterans  
18 affected by the delays. The committee would like  
19 to find out to what degree the New York City  
20 veteran student community has been affected. The  
21 committee will hear from CUNY and veterans alike  
22 to see what is being done to keep these veterans  
23 in college. The Post 9/11 GI Bill is a  
24 significant piece of legislation which has the  
25 potential to positively affect the lives of

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2 thousands of veterans and their families. It is  
3 imperative that the VA move swiftly to address the  
4 backlog. It is our hope that we in New York City  
5 can do our best to keep veterans enrolled in  
6 school and moving forward. Before we call  
7 witnesses, I'm of course going to allow my  
8 colleague Council Member Barron to make a  
9 statement. I do want to encourage my colleague  
10 Tony Avella that he has a demonstration that he's  
11 calling and in your comments, sir, I believe it  
12 would be most appropriate, in your comments when  
13 it's proper, to remind people of these things.  
14 Chair Barron.

15 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.  
16 I'd like to read my statement for the record.  
17 Today the Committees on Veterans Affairs and  
18 Higher Education will examine whether CUNY veteran  
19 students have been affected by the reported delays  
20 in the application process and payments for their  
21 education under the Post 9/11 GI Bill and will  
22 also examine what measures are being taken to  
23 enable veteran students to continue their college  
24 education. As a matter of fact, the VA should  
25 have been here. A lot of this falls on the VA and

1 while most of the people that will testimony today  
2 whether it's those who are fighting or advocates  
3 or whether those are CUNY which is doing all it  
4 can to adhere to the 1,700 students, the VA should  
5 have been here and at some point we've got to  
6 really approach them about this very, very serious  
7 situation. The United States Department of  
8 Veterans Affairs, or the VA, administers the basic  
9 education program for veterans and military  
10 service personnel seeking assistance for education  
11 or training. One significant piece of legislation  
12 that helps veterans gain access to higher  
13 education or the benefits is the Post 9/11 GI Bill  
14 which was passed into law June 2008 and took  
15 effect on August 1, 2009. Under the Post 9/11 GI  
16 Bill, a veteran who has served on active duty for  
17 at least 90 days or after September 11, 2011 may  
18 receive funding for the full cost of education at  
19 any public postsecondary institution in the  
20 country and also a partial funding toward tuition  
21 at private colleges. The Post 9/11 GI Bill  
22 includes undergraduate, graduate degrees and  
23 vocational or technical training. The Post 9/11  
24 GI Bill also provides a monthly living stipend and  
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2 \$1,000 towards books for the year. Approximately  
3 1,700 or more student veterans are enrolled at  
4 CUNY, placing the university in the top ten for  
5 veteran student enrollment among the country's  
6 higher education institutions. CUNY's veteran  
7 population has increased by approximately 10%  
8 every year since 2004 and continues to grow.  
9 During these harsh economic times when many  
10 students are struggling to afford college while  
11 trying to maintain their daily living expenses  
12 such as food, rent, transportation and child care,  
13 it is extremely important that all students,  
14 including veterans, get the support they need to  
15 continue their college education and lead  
16 productive lives. Thank you very much Mr.  
17 Chairman.

18 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: As a veteran  
19 who attended Brooklyn College on the GI Bill, I  
20 know how important this is. Not to have money  
21 when I'm making that transition would have been  
22 critical to me. It was hard enough getting into  
23 school, changing my mindset and trying to get into  
24 school, but if the money didn't go right and if I  
25 couldn't get the books I don't know if I could

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have made that transition. Just my heart responding. Sir, would you be kind enough to call the first witness?

MATTHEW CARLIN: Yes. Andrew Roberts. I have to swear you in. Would you raise your right hand please? Do you swear or affirm that the testimony that you're at to give is to the best of your knowledge truthful and accurate?

ANDREW ROBERTS: I do.

MATTHEW CARLIN: Thank you.

ANDREW ROBERTS: Good afternoon. My name is Andrew Roberts. I'm a West Point graduate and I'm also an Iraq war veteran. I'm currently serving as a Deputy Director for the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs. I am very thankful that you are having this hearing right now. I think this is an extremely important issue and I'm glad you're bringing attention to it. I want to be very clear up front. I do not work for the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs. I work for the state. Our mission is to connect veterans with their federal and state benefits that they may be entitled to. There are a variety of great benefits that exist, both at

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2 the federal and state level, but they do not go to  
3 the veteran. You have to go to those benefits,  
4 and that is what we assist veterans with. This  
5 process can be extremely complicated and we have  
6 fulltime state veterans counselors that are around  
7 New York State and that's their job to assist  
8 veterans with this process. I'm the Deputy  
9 Director for the eastern region of New York, so  
10 I'm responsible for all of the offices basically  
11 from the Canadian border out to the tip of Long  
12 Island, including New York City. My office is  
13 here in Brooklyn. I just want to give you this  
14 background of what we do. If a veteran comes to  
15 us, they receive a 360 degree assessment of all of  
16 their needs. We discover pretty much anything  
17 they may be entitled to. They come in for one  
18 thing and we'll figure out what else they might be  
19 entitled to. It's something that I wish that I  
20 had been aware of that this existed when I got out  
21 of the Army in 2004. The benefits that veterans  
22 may be entitled to include compensation, pension,  
23 ranging from property tax exemptions, there are  
24 state educational benefits and there's also of  
25 course the new GI Bill, which brings me to my next

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2 point. We have seen a large increase in number of  
3 questions that we're receiving regarding this  
4 benefit and right now just right up front, we do  
5 not have exact numbers on how many veterans we  
6 even have right now in New York State. They're  
7 all kind of estimates of the number of veterans  
8 that have come home. But I can tell you that the  
9 problems that New Yorkers are facing are probably  
10 a reflection of the federal numbers. I was able  
11 to obtain this, that this year the VA has received  
12 over 265,000 claims for educational benefits.  
13 That is an increase from 56,000 from last year.  
14 So that is over 200,000 additional claims that  
15 have been put in on top of a brand new system that  
16 the VA had just developed. With this combination  
17 it makes sense why we're starting to see some  
18 backlogs. Now, the VA has processed a large  
19 number of these claims. Apparently up to 70% have  
20 been processed but that does not mean that funds  
21 have been dispersed, as you are aware. It's hard  
22 to get an accurate number at this time, but it is  
23 estimated that only a third of applicants have  
24 received their payments for school, leaving an  
25 estimated 170,000 veterans across the country

1 without payment for school at this time. But if  
2 you can figure out how many veterans there are in  
3 the city, I'm sure it's approximately the same,  
4 that approximately one-third have received money  
5 and the remaining two-thirds are left without. I  
6 just asked a veteran when I walked in if he had  
7 gotten any money and it was like an eye roll, he  
8 had not yet. I do want to say that, again,  
9 although I don't work for the VA, they are working  
10 hard to fix the situation. They've hired an  
11 additional 1,300 new employees and Secretary  
12 Shinseki recently revealed I think this week that  
13 there will be an automated process put in place  
14 next month which will supposedly remedy some of  
15 the problems and start making these things go  
16 away. But the reality is that this is a huge  
17 change for the VA and they're scrambling to fix it  
18 and it's not fixed yet. So what are we going to  
19 do about this? Well right now, I mean I can't go  
20 and change the system but I can tell you what New  
21 York State has done under the leadership of my  
22 boss, Director Jim McDonough. We've basically  
23 done three things. We've done outreach, we've  
24 moved into schools and we've started discussion.  
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2 For outreach, we have sent a flier to 80,000  
3 recently returned veterans. I think over the last  
4 five years if they've served in the military they  
5 received a flier from us indicating what services  
6 that we can provide them and trying to get them to  
7 come to us. We have moved to schools. To respond  
8 to the increase of the veterans attending school,  
9 we have begun developing relationships with them  
10 and at time we've put counselors working either  
11 part time or even full time into colleges around  
12 New York State. Some of these colleges include  
13 Empire State College, Adirondack Community College  
14 and the Culinary Institute of America where we  
15 have a counselor going approximately once a month.  
16 Ideally, when we're in these schools, and I've  
17 been encouraging people that work for me to do  
18 this, is to establish relationships with people  
19 that are working in schools. Get someone smart on  
20 the GI Bill and then use us as a point of contact  
21 when you get stuck. But every college in New York  
22 should have someone who is GI Bill smart and savvy  
23 who can really facilitate a veteran getting into  
24 the school, and then we'll be there if they have  
25 any questions. So finally, we have started the

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2 discussion. We've been going on a statewide tour  
3 basically with what's called a veteran friendly  
4 campus discussion. It's an informative briefing  
5 that we have reached out to over 78 different  
6 schools around the state that have participated in  
7 these where we talk about the new GI Bill, the  
8 benefits that are available to them, but also how  
9 a school can be more veteran friendly. The  
10 importance of something like celebrating Veterans  
11 Day at your school and recognizing the sacrifices  
12 that veterans have made. We will be in the city;  
13 my director will be there on 12 November at  
14 Columbia and at Empire State College on the 13th  
15 of November. So what about these delayed  
16 payments? Our rallying cry has really been  
17 colleges have to defer these payments. That's  
18 part of what we talk about when we go to these  
19 schools is we let them know about the sacrifices  
20 that our veterans have made and we ask them to  
21 consider deferring the payments until the VA can  
22 get itself fixed. Currently it's the law that  
23 public schools must defer payments for veterans  
24 awaiting GI Bill. That is not the case for  
25 private schools, but it is clearly the right thing

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2 to do. There are many soldiers right now who are  
3 serving and counting on this GI Bill. It gives  
4 them hope for a future beyond the rocky desolate  
5 outpost in Afghanistan or a crowded city street in  
6 Iraq where you might not know where the enemy is  
7 coming from. It literally gives them hope for the  
8 future. I can tell from my own experiences that  
9 that future can sometimes seem pretty bleak. So  
10 to have this hope it's very important. Thousands  
11 of people, as you know, have given their lives for  
12 these wars. Tens of thousands have been injured  
13 and potentially hundreds of thousands are  
14 suffering from invisible wounds like Post  
15 Traumatic Stress Disorder and traumatic brain  
16 injury. This GI Bill is a reward for that service  
17 that they have earned. Their future should not be  
18 put in jeopardy due to payments that they have no  
19 control over. We can send them to war but we can  
20 give them that education when they come home. I  
21 want to just make my services available to anyone  
22 that is interested in them. I would happy to  
23 arrange for what we call our veteran friendly  
24 campus discussion at any schools that are here.  
25 If there are any local leaders in the room that

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2 would like to set one up in their area, I would be  
3 happy to arrange that. My personal mission is to  
4 do the right thing by our veterans and I think  
5 this hearing is a great start and I appreciate  
6 that we're having it. So thank you very much for  
7 this opportunity.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you  
9 sir. Let me digress for a second to go into the  
10 record also. We did get in touch with the  
11 Veterans Administration I believe sir. They were  
12 sent an invitation. Did they respond in any  
13 fashion? No response in any fashion. Can we also  
14 write the secretary of the VA and give him our  
15 displeasure that we're trying to do a hearing of  
16 what is happening with veterans? I for one saw  
17 and just got the feeling that our country's great  
18 love for the troops seems to end when they come  
19 home. As soon as one becomes a veteran, and this  
20 is my own personal observation, this is not the  
21 observation necessarily of this committee, but I  
22 will state that I saw an incredible drop off and  
23 I've always seen a drop off of support. I will  
24 stop there and address what you're doing and why  
25 you're here. Thank you for coming here. Easier

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that West Point?

ANDREW ROBERTS: A little bit. No, I don't know. No comment.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: The questions will tell. So the state is at least trying to fill the gap. How much do you work with New York City with MOVA, the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs?

ANDREW ROBERTS: I have a relationship with them but I haven't done too many things directly with that organization. I have an office on 25 Chapel Street which is home to part of a large city organization. There is a Veteran Job Center that's out there and we have a counselor that we work very closely with on referrals between that organization and our own.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: If I can encourage that working relationship, especially in this day where it seems that from what you're saying and what I'm hearing that the VA is totally overwhelmed on this issue, simply overwhelmed right now. They may be struggling to do, but we do have to go to many schools, and to encourage the veterans themselves because after the schools

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2 are okay, this money was counted on to pay for  
3 books, to pay for food, to pay for whatever we had  
4 to use the money for like transportation, et  
5 cetera. This is a time where we really have to  
6 reach out to get to everyday people and say hey,  
7 life does happen, if you've been through Iraq,  
8 this should be a walk in the park, if you've been  
9 through that.

10 ANDREW ROBERTS: Right. I would  
11 like to say that I think that if schools are aware  
12 that this isn't the veteran failing to fill out  
13 the form and it's not the veteran failing to do  
14 something, that it's actually above and beyond  
15 their control, I would like to think that a high  
16 percentage of schools would be willing to defer  
17 payments for a while until the VA gets itself  
18 squared away. But I'm not sure that if they don't  
19 know what the situation is then they might be less  
20 likely to forgive those payments. So I think it's  
21 important to get the word out.

22 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I think that  
23 you're right that it would be the smaller schools  
24 or the more private schools that would have more  
25 of a difficulty, at least when I hear from CUNY

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2 I'm hoping that that's right. I suspect that it's  
3 the schools with a smaller veteran population,  
4 some proprietary schools, some other type of  
5 schools that really don't have many veterans  
6 coming through it that my have more difficulty.  
7 If that's true then we certainly, this committee  
8 will join you in trying to get this word out. I  
9 certainly will join you in trying to do whatever I  
10 can to let these schools know, hey, you're going  
11 to get your money, now can we get a little  
12 education going while this is taking place. I  
13 will defer to my colleague Council Member Barron  
14 in a moment after I acknowledge that Council  
15 Member Gale Brewer from Manhattan has joined us.  
16 Chair Barron.

17 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you very  
18 much. I just want to get a little clarity. So  
19 there are about 265,000 applicants and only  
20 approximately 90,000 were actually processed and  
21 still 170,000 is due.

22 ANDREW ROBERTS: That's correct.  
23 Let me just verify that. From what I've learned  
24 and I saw this today and this was from September  
25 26th, 2009. There were 260,000 claims put in.

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CHAIRPERSON BARRON: 260,000.

ANDREW ROBERTS: That's an increase from 56,000 last year. It's estimated that only about a third of that 260,000 has received payment.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Is the money there? Do you know that? Do they have the money? Do you know how much? I know this is tough for you because you're not the VA, but from your relationship with the VA, is the money actually there?

ANDREW ROBERTS: It's a good question that I don't know the answer to. I'd like to say yes but it would just be speculation.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I'm trying to find out whether this is a funding problem or a process bureaucracy problem, because that's ridiculous if it's bureaucratic and the money is sitting right there. Well, anyway, that's not on you. Do you have any relationship with CUNY?

ANDREW ROBERTS: I have a great relationship with CUNY. I talk with Wilfred Cotto probably more than I would like. We have a great relationship with them and I think we're both very

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supportive of one another's organizations.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Keep up the good work. I'm sure if anybody else has any questions feel free.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Council Member Avella?

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I want to thank you for coming out here to the hearing. I just have a couple of questions which don't necessarily relate to the topic but I'd like to get some background information. How many people work in the state agency for veterans?

ANDREW ROBERTS: We have about 100 people.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: How does that break down?

ANDREW ROBERTS: It's about 50/50 from east and west. There are approximately 50 people that I'm responsible for in the eastern region.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: How many people do you have in the city?

ANDREW ROBERTS: In New York City,

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I have to do the math.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: Just a general number.

ANDREW ROBERTS: I've got about ten people. So, a lot of my staff are right here in the city. It's our center of gravity.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: I know the chair asked you about your relationship with MOVA. I would think it would be incumbent upon them to reach out to you. Has that ever occurred? I mean, are you doing the outreach to them? They should be doing the outreach to you since you are a state agency.

ANDREW ROBERTS: I've been doing this job for just about a year now. I talked to them initially when I got here but I haven't talked to them too much since.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: But it was you reached out to them.

ANDREW ROBERTS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: And they haven't reached out to you subsequently?

ANDREW ROBERTS: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: I'm not

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surprised. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Mr. Chair, if I may, I just want to acknowledge Council Member Lou Fidler from Brooklyn who is here as well.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Do we have any other questions for this speaker, Council Member Mealy, oh none at all. Sir, I want to thank you for coming out. We have that it was 277,000. You have 266,000. I hope that your number is better. Ours is sadly more recent. We've just got a real mess on our hands and God willing we can sort it through. I trust that the fellows and the young ladies have patience and a lot of discipline. And even more important, I trust that we can get to these schools. If you hear of any school giving a hard time, please let me personally know. I would love to personally call them people and read them the riot act and tell them wait a minute. Let me know. I would be glad to have an offline conversation with them.

ANDREW ROBERTS: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you.

ANDREW ROBERTS: Thank you very much.

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2 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: You are  
3 dismissed, sir, thank you very much.

4 ANDREW ROBERTS: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: You can call  
6 your next witness.

7 MATTHEW CARLIN: The next witness  
8 is Wilfred Cotto from CUNY, also Vice Chancellor  
9 Peter Jordan, Aubrey Arcangel, August Coleman and  
10 Eric Glaude.

11 MATTHEW CARLIN: I just want to  
12 swear you in. Can all of you raise your right  
13 hands please? Do you swear or affirm that the  
14 testimony you're about to give is to the best of  
15 your knowledge truthful and accurate.

16 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Council  
17 Member Avella.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: Just  
19 because you made a mention of the fact that the VA  
20 was invited and they chose not to show up. Am I  
21 correct that MOVA was also invited and they chose  
22 not to show up, for the record?

23 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Yes, that is  
24 correct sir.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: I think

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2 that's important to point out for the record that  
3 they have been invited once again and they chose  
4 not to show up.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I accept the  
6 point of clarification. I will let you begin your  
7 testimony in the way that you see fit. Remember  
8 to speak into the mike. This is going on the  
9 record. When the button is lit, it is on. As you  
10 wish.

11 PETER JORDAN: Good after and thank  
12 you Chairperson Sanders, Thank you Chairperson  
13 Barron and members of the Higher Education and  
14 Veterans Committee of the City Council. I'm Peter  
15 Jordan, newly-appointed interim Vice Chancellor  
16 for Student Affairs for the City University of New  
17 York. We are grateful to the Council and to these  
18 committees for the opportunity to speak to you  
19 this afternoon about CUNY's student veterans and  
20 the services provided for these students across  
21 CUNY campuses. Testifying with me today is  
22 Wilfred Cotto, a veteran and University Director  
23 of Veterans Affairs for the City University of New  
24 York. He will offer detailed information about  
25 CUNY's veteran services and operations and speak

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2 to the question at issue here today. In addition,  
3 you will hear testimony from two CUNY students who  
4 are veterans as well as a counselor and veterans'  
5 coordinator at one of our campuses. They are Mr.  
6 Aubrey Arcangel who is sitting to my right. He is  
7 a junior at the City College of New York and Ms.  
8 August Coleman who is a first-year student at  
9 Hostos Community College in the Bronx. Also  
10 joining us is Mr. Eric Glaude who is the  
11 counselor, social worker and veterans coordinator  
12 at the Borough of Manhattan Community College.  
13 The faculty and staff and administrators of CUNY  
14 are profoundly grateful to our veterans for their  
15 service, sacrifice and many contributions to our  
16 country. In turn, we are very proud to serve our  
17 student veterans by helping them access  
18 educational opportunities and achieve their  
19 educational and career goals. Our Office of  
20 Veterans Affairs is actively engaged in promoting  
21 access to higher education for student veterans.  
22 We also offer comprehensive services to support  
23 their transition to college and to civilian life,  
24 their persistence and graduation from college.  
25 Though not a veteran myself, I take special

1  
2 interest and pride in ensuring that our student  
3 veterans find the resources and develop the skills  
4 that they need to succeed at CUNY and beyond. You  
5 have heard from Chairperson Barron about the  
6 enrollments of veterans at CUNY campuses and we  
7 are very proud to be one of the country's most  
8 veteran friendly institutions. The university and  
9 its campuses provide a range of academic and  
10 support services designed to ease the transition  
11 to college and civilian life for these students.  
12 These services include academic advising;  
13 counseling, particularly around post deployment  
14 issues; advice on financial literacy and financial  
15 planning, particularly around benefits available  
16 to veterans and other financial aid. Job  
17 placement counseling is also available and  
18 accommodations for disabled veterans, to name a  
19 few of the services that we provide. In addition,  
20 recruitment efforts are an important part of our  
21 commitment to encourage veterans to participate in  
22 higher education. Assisting veterans with gaining  
23 admissions to our university, the various campuses  
24 within CUNY, and accessing available financial  
25 benefits is a priority, especially those benefits

1  
2 related to the enhanced Post 9/11 GI Bill and the  
3 New York City Veterans Tuition Award. Both the  
4 university's central office and its colleges work  
5 closely with the Mayor's Office of Veterans  
6 Affairs and community groups in all five boroughs.  
7 In all of these activities, the university's  
8 central Office of Veterans Affairs, led by Mr.  
9 Cotto, works collaboratively with our Veterans  
10 Affairs offices on CUNY campuses across New York  
11 City. Our goal is to ensure that the quality and  
12 availability of student programs and services and  
13 to be a comprehensive resource for students across  
14 CUNY are campus administrators and the community.  
15 Our comprehensive veterans' services are reaching  
16 more and more students and we're constantly  
17 evolving and improving our capacity to serve the  
18 specific needs of these students. My colleague,  
19 the university Director of Veterans Affairs, Mr.  
20 Cotto, will offer the committee details about the  
21 funding process, tuition payments, the challenges  
22 students face and initiatives and issues that I've  
23 raised here. He will also introduce student  
24 veterans and/or administrator from the MCC. Let  
25 me assure you once again, the City University is

1  
2 fully committed to assisting the men and women who  
3 have served our country in achieving an excellent  
4 post-active duty education. The City Council's  
5 ongoing assistance in helping us honor this  
6 commitment and meeting this growing need is truly  
7 appreciated.

8 WILFRED COTTO: Thank you, Vice  
9 Chancellor Jordan. Good afternoon Chairman  
10 Barron. Good afternoon Chairman Sanders. Members  
11 of the Higher Education and Veterans Committee, I  
12 am Wilfred Cotto, University Coordinator for  
13 Veterans Affairs at the City University of New  
14 York. I am grateful to have this opportunity to  
15 speak with you here today about the Post 9/11 GI  
16 Bill and about what CUNY is doing to ensure that  
17 student veterans stay in school while awaiting  
18 payment of educational benefits. As a 28-year  
19 veteran of the United States Navy and a combat  
20 veteran of the Persian Gulf, I take a very special  
21 interest in ensuring that veterans find at CUNY  
22 the specific resources they need to successful  
23 meet their educational, career and personal goals.  
24 The Post 9/11 GI Bill became effective for  
25 training on 1 August 2009. This program pays for,

1  
2 as was stated, tuition and fees directly to the  
3 school, not to exceed the maximum in-state tuition  
4 and fees at a public institution of higher  
5 learning. It also pays a monthly housing and  
6 living allowance directly to the student based  
7 upon the location of the school. For example, in  
8 Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx and in Queens, a  
9 student who attends fulltime currently receives  
10 \$2,744 a month living stipend while attending  
11 school on a fulltime basis. In the borough of  
12 Staten Island it's just a little bit less. That  
13 student receives \$1,843 a month. In addition to  
14 that, there is also an annual stipend for books  
15 and materials of \$1,000 a year. Since the  
16 announcement of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, CUNY has  
17 taken a proactive approach to facilitate the  
18 process and ensure that student veterans can  
19 apply, register and enroll in desired classes and  
20 can stay in school while awaiting tuition and fee  
21 payment from the Veterans Administration.  
22 Currently, CUNY waives all application fees for  
23 returning veterans. The university provides  
24 information and updates on the new educational  
25 benefit to current and prospective students,

1  
2 faculty and staff via the CUNY veterans website, a  
3 virtual one-stop source of information for  
4 returning military veterans and their families.

5 The CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs in  
6 collaboration with the VA and the New York State  
7 Division of Veterans Affairs has hosted a number  
8 of professional development sessions for students,  
9 faculty and staff to discuss details, enhancements  
10 and processing procedures of the Post 9/11 GI  
11 Bill. University registrars, financial aid  
12 professionals, certifying officials have all been  
13 provided guidance on how to properly code student  
14 veterans utilizing Post 9/11 benefits to avoid  
15 unnecessary student billing of tuition and fees or  
16 erroneous notification of course termination due  
17 to nonpayment of tuition and fees. This academic  
18 year the university allocated funding to all of  
19 its community and city and senior colleges for  
20 campus veteran services including the hiring of  
21 full and part time staff and the enhancement of  
22 programs and services for student veterans. Many  
23 of our campuses employ student veterans as peer  
24 advocates to assist other student veterans with  
25 their transition and readjustment needs to the

1 college classroom. The Project for Return and  
2 Opportunity in Veterans Education, we call it  
3 PROVE, at the Hunter School of Social Work employs  
4 graduate social work student interns to work with  
5 student veterans assisting in social, emotional,  
6 physical and psychological readjustment needs. We  
7 acknowledge that the implementation of this new  
8 benefit was and continues to be a heavy lift for  
9 the VA. Under the best of circumstances it would  
10 have been difficult to forecast the influx of  
11 veterans signing up for this new bill. However,  
12 we must also acknowledge that the backlog in the  
13 processing of these payments does create  
14 unnecessary hardships for student veterans. In  
15 particular, those attempting to attend school on a  
16 fulltime basis who rely heavily on the timely  
17 payment of benefits, living and book allowance in  
18 order to support themselves as fulltime students.  
19 I am pleased to note that the VA recently  
20 announced that payment of the emergency check in  
21 the amount of \$3,000 to all student veterans  
22 enrolled in college awaiting payment of benefits.  
23 This was the right thing to do. I applaud the  
24 VA's effort, while cautioning that there is still  
25

1  
2 much work to be done. At this point I would like  
3 to turn the time over to Mr. Aubrey Arcangel, a  
4 CUNY student veteran attending the City College of  
5 New York to share his experiences with the new  
6 benefit and how it has affected his decision to  
7 stay in school. Chairman Barron, Chairman  
8 Sanders, members of the committee, thank you for  
9 your continued support.

10 AUBREY ARCANGEL: Good afternoon  
11 Chairman Barron, Chairman Sanders and members of  
12 the Higher Education and Veterans Committee. I  
13 just want to thank you again today for taking the  
14 time out to listen to us speak about the issues  
15 that veterans face with this GI Bill payment  
16 delay. As Wilfred Cotto stated, my name is Aubrey  
17 Arcangel. I am a junior at the City College of  
18 New York studying political science and also an  
19 Iraq war veteran. I'm here today not only as a  
20 student veteran receiving GI Bill benefits, but  
21 also as a student veteran leader at my college  
22 campus Veterans Club and the New York City  
23 Director of the Student Veterans of America, which  
24 is a coalition of veterans groups on college  
25 campuses across the country representing over 200

1 chapters nationwide with six chapters here in New  
2 York City. Last year I along with other fellow  
3 veterans from CUNY and various college campuses  
4 across the northeast sat before Congress urging  
5 them to pass the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Once it was  
6 signed into law, veterans and service members  
7 currently serving celebrated with high-fives for  
8 this benefit we rightfully earned for our service  
9 to our nation. Finally, the Post 9/11 GI Bill  
10 would remove the long-standing barriers to  
11 veterans in the classroom. Once the fall 2009  
12 semester started, delay in processing applications  
13 and distributing payments to student veterans  
14 allowed these barriers to remain intact and  
15 veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan  
16 attempting to enroll continued to struggle under  
17 the weight of fundamental burdens. One of my  
18 fellow veterans at the City College of New York,  
19 Brian Austerly [phonetic], a former infantryman  
20 with 101st Airborne Division who served two tours  
21 in Iraq eagerly joined us at the beginning of the  
22 semester. Brian suffered multiple injuries during  
23 his two tours, including two ruptured discs in his  
24 spine, moderate traumatic brain injury and post  
25

1  
2 traumatic stress disorder. Brian tried to attend  
3 school in 2004 but could not afford it. The  
4 enhanced benefits he was awaiting from the Post  
5 9/11 GI Bill made his dream of finishing college  
6 seem within his reach. Brian lives with his  
7 girlfriend who has been supporting his transition  
8 from the military to civilian world. At the end  
9 of September she was laid off, and because Brian  
10 at the time did not receive any GI Bill benefits,  
11 he was in the position of being forced to drop out  
12 to make ends meet. With the announcement of the  
13 VA's emergency payments, Brian did not have to put  
14 his dream of finishing college to the side and was  
15 able to stay in school. Also, with the help of  
16 the administration at the City College of New  
17 York, they were able to patch up some of the holes  
18 left by the VA. Veterans were invited to apply  
19 for an emergency loan through the school, which is  
20 processed swiftly to help pay some of the living  
21 expenses and also books. Unfortunately this meant  
22 having to buy them from the bookstore where prices  
23 are significantly higher than other venues like  
24 online book stores. For those of us who have been  
25 using the old GI Bill, we were awkwardly trying to

1  
2 convince our new student veterans that these  
3 delays are the norm. We were used to these late  
4 payments and have typically planned accordingly.  
5 Army veteran Jawong [phonetic], an international  
6 study student, also at the City College of New  
7 York, struck a deal with his landlord allowing him  
8 extra time to pay his rent because of delays in  
9 receiving his monthly disbursement. Other student  
10 veterans were watching the situation develop day  
11 to day trying to figure out how long they were  
12 able to hold on before they would have to drop out  
13 to pay bills. We made due with the system before,  
14 but the Post 9/11 GI Bill was supposed to change  
15 this. Despite these financial hardships, these  
16 veterans continue to remain in school. With the  
17 efforts of the Student Veterans of America and  
18 other VSOs urging the VA to act swiftly on this  
19 problem, the emergency payment was released.  
20 While applauding their efforts with their action,  
21 we remain cautious as tens of thousands of  
22 veterans nationwide are still awaiting their GI  
23 Bill payments. We hope this matter becomes  
24 resolved soon before we lose student veterans to  
25 these financial hardships. Thank you.

1  
2 AUGUST COLEMAN: Good afternoon  
3 Chairman Barron and Chairman Sanders and members  
4 of the Higher Education and Veterans Committee. I  
5 am August Coleman, a student at Hostos Community  
6 College. I thank you for letting me have the  
7 opportunity to speak with you today concerning the  
8 Post 9/11 GI Bill. I served in the United States  
9 Army for three years. My duty stations were in  
10 Ft. Hood, Texas and Iraq. While touring in Iraq I  
11 served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The delay of  
12 payments for veteran education benefits has caused  
13 me tremendous hardship. As a veteran I already  
14 have struggles with adjusting to becoming a  
15 civilian, a student, a mother and trying to deal  
16 with emotional combat-related problems. The  
17 financial problems concerning school made these  
18 feelings much worse. The delay has resulted in me  
19 not being able to get the books I needed to start  
20 school. I went through the first four weeks of  
21 class with no books. College school books range  
22 from \$80 to \$200. For me this was a lot of money  
23 I needed to get books for my classes. Then it  
24 left me with not being able to pay my bills and  
25 some not being able to pay on time because I

1  
2 didn't receive my BAH payment from my education  
3 benefits. These problems put more stress on me  
4 that was not needed. It did not help me with  
5 adjusting. It actually kept me from adjusting and  
6 the situation caused me more depression, more  
7 anxiety and some more substance abuse. The  
8 programs that are provided to veterans will have  
9 harder time with helping us veterans because the  
10 whole situation is a domino effect. One problem  
11 causes another and makes more problems even worse.  
12 I would like to thank you again for giving me this  
13 opportunity to share my experience. God bless you  
14 all.

15 ERIC GLAUDE: Good afternoon,  
16 Chairman Barron, Chairman Sanders and the rest of  
17 the Higher Education and Veterans Committee. My  
18 name is Eric Glaude. I am a Vietnam era veteran  
19 who served back in the 60s. I have been working  
20 at the VA for about 20 years and now am working  
21 with the Borough of Manhattan Community College.  
22 I work with the Vet Center programs, maybe some of  
23 you are familiar with that, but we focused on  
24 working with war zone veterans only and women with  
25 sexual trauma. I bring that experience with me to

1  
2 the Borough of Manhattan Community College where I  
3 am the counselor specializing in veterans affairs.  
4 What I do there and my experience is that I have  
5 realized that there are student veterans who have  
6 a dilemma. Part of the dilemma comes out of the  
7 fact that they need financial assistance. In  
8 trying to get this financial assistance it tends  
9 to reveal they are veterans as opposed to  
10 students. They happen to be veterans. They are  
11 students and they do need the assistance of the  
12 VA, as I did when I got out. When I was  
13 discharged there was the GI Bill as well and that  
14 was very helpful. A lot of the students come to  
15 me and I have at this point 175 veterans who have  
16 been actually identified. That does not mean that  
17 that's all that we have at BMCC. We do have an  
18 accurate total of 58 new veterans that have come  
19 in this semester. I have only been there at BMCC  
20 as a counselor for veteran affairs for the last  
21 three months. I arrived there in July. Most of  
22 the student veterans there were very happy to have  
23 me come onboard. I was able to assist them in  
24 many ways. I would like to point out the  
25 differences and the similarities in these veterans

1  
2 at this point, which really motivates me to even  
3 work harder for them and hopefully to get your ear  
4 to see if there is something that you can do to  
5 help us to have these veterans receive their  
6 funding so they can attend college. They usually  
7 are mature. They have different kinds of life  
8 experiences, particularly in the military, which  
9 is a different culture. Coming out of the  
10 military tends to introduce them to a whole new  
11 world of unstructured existence, as you've heard  
12 some of the veterans share their experiences  
13 today. They usually are parents. They are  
14 concerned about their financial support even  
15 beyond the GI Bill. They have housing issues,  
16 which I'm happy to say that the new GI Bill offers  
17 something that I didn't have when I was in  
18 college. They usually are looking for employment  
19 as well, or are employed in order to support their  
20 education. They also have other addition  
21 commitments. They're disciplined and highly  
22 motivated I've found. One of the main motivating  
23 factors for me transferring or retiring out of the  
24 VA and going into the Borough of Manhattan  
25 Community College, something that I've always

1  
2 wanted to do. They're basically a non-traditional  
3 student, but still they are students. What I  
4 would like to also point out is that there is an  
5 increase in the veteran population at BMCC as well  
6 as in CUNY. We had 104 students that were  
7 documented. I later found out there were actually  
8 about 173 and today we have 185. So there  
9 definitely is an increase. Some of them had to  
10 drop out because of not receiving the new GI Bill  
11 monies. However, as you may know, the president  
12 gave us a stipend kind of boost by allowing each  
13 veteran to collect \$3,000 out of their monies that  
14 they're supposed to be receiving or that they're  
15 going to receive. Most of the veterans that we  
16 have are fulltime and they usually are reservists,  
17 active duty, we have several active duty veterans,  
18 National Guard, full time, part time and also  
19 family members of veterans. We expect and  
20 anticipate having more and therefore they have  
21 charged me with the outreach, the retention and  
22 also the success of getting the veterans out on  
23 time. I'd like to celebrate the information or  
24 the fact that most of the veterans are grade point  
25 averages of about 3.0. We have several that are

1  
2 4.0 and all are above 2.0. Thank you very much  
3 for allowing me the time to share this information  
4 with you. Any questions that you have I think  
5 we're willing to answer at this point. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I have two  
7 questions. Most veterans come home and the  
8 majority of veterans who come back make their  
9 transition into society and we never really hear  
10 from them. They make their transition. A  
11 percentage of veterans need more attention. They  
12 need some help making the return home. They need  
13 some help. Any stumbling point in there can lead  
14 to us losing some of these folk. I want to hear  
15 from your Mr. Glaude and my student leaders. What  
16 percentage of veterans will be lost? A  
17 guesstimate of what percentage are we going to  
18 lose. What percentage of people can't make the  
19 transition and can't get above this stumbling  
20 block? Is this a real problem, or is this not a  
21 real problem? We'll start with your professional  
22 opinion. This is an opinion and this is a  
23 guesstimate.

24 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Before you  
25 answer the question I just wanted to announce that

1

2 Council Member Eric Ulrich from Queens has been  
3 here and has been a consistent member of our  
4 committee and he has to go to another hearing, so  
5 I just wanted to announce it.

6

ERIC GLAUDE: To answer that  
7 question is kind of difficult because each veteran  
8 is an individual and that's how we treat our  
9 soldiers and service members. But if I were to  
10 have a guesstimate, if ten veterans came into my  
11 office, three of them would have some kind of  
12 issue that would need to be addressed in order to  
13 have them maintain their active status in school.

14

PETER JORDAN: As Mr. Glaude  
15 pointed out, it's a difficult question to answer,  
16 as you know. But one of the things that we are  
17 focused on across CUNY and through our veterans  
18 affairs recruitment efforts is to make sure that we  
19 connect with community organizations and veterans  
20 support organizations where we can provide  
21 counseling and information about the value of  
22 getting a college education, especially for those  
23 who are trying to transition into civilian life.  
24 It's those recruitment efforts that we use to try  
25 to close the gap for those individuals who may

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otherwise fall between the cracks.

WILFRED COTTO: I think your question, Council Member, is right on target. As a former marine it's right on point. We are going to lose a certain percentage of them and you know that through attrition and you know that not everybody that goes to Paris Island makes it through, so we're concerned about that. So if I was guesstimating, it's about 25-30%. We have to have some kind of number in our minds in order to target our strategies. So if I'm thinking 25-30%, then I need to put together some type of strategic plan to address that 25-30%. So what do we do? We're aggressive about our outreach, i.e., we have a college fair coming up next month in celebration of not only CUNY month but veterans month, right at BMCC. You're all invited to come. Please join us. It's directly at veterans. This is our third annual. It's directly at that community to show them about admissions, financial aid, GI Bill benefits, counselors, financial aid counselors, all these people will be in one place at one time to address this kind of stuff right at front at the moment. We also have a student vet panel that

1  
2 will talk about student life and some of these  
3 real issues. We'll probably have a guest speaker  
4 either from New York State Division of Veterans  
5 Affairs, VA or MOVA or a combination of. We also  
6 have our partners and our community agencies that  
7 are there to also provide supportive type things  
8 for these prospective students and veterans. Our  
9 information sessions that take place twice a month  
10 address incoming prospective student vets. The  
11 next part of this is once we get them in and once  
12 we do all this effort to recruit them, how do we  
13 retain them? As a 28-year senior enlisted advisor  
14 in the United States Navy, retention was always an  
15 issue. How do we retain them? What programs,  
16 what services, what things do we have in place to  
17 say how are you doing in classes, how is school  
18 going? We have counselors like Mr. Glaude. We  
19 have peer advocates like these two students. We  
20 have program at different campuses and people that  
21 reach out to these people and are doing a much  
22 better job at tracking and identifying these  
23 issues up front so that we can address them. We  
24 know we're not going to retain 100%. That's  
25 unrealistic. But we're going to target that 25-

1  
2 30% and we're going to go after them aggressively  
3 and we're going to see what we can do to try to  
4 make their stay at CUNY just a little bit better  
5 so they can get through school.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Well put sir.  
7 My student leaders, you are the boots on the  
8 ground. You're the front line. You're going to  
9 see it first. What have you seen? Are we losing  
10 folk? Certainly Joey who was there before is not  
11 here. What are you hearing of this? What  
12 percentage may we lose if we don't get this  
13 situation together?

14 AUBREY ARCANGEL: That's a tough  
15 question. I can't really come up with a figure in  
16 my mind. There are a few things that help there.  
17 At the beginning of this fall semester at the City  
18 College of New York we had a vice president of  
19 grounds. He was a Vietnam veteran and also  
20 happened to be the veteran coordinator at City  
21 College during the Vietnam era, so he's aware of  
22 these types of issues. One of his ideas was to  
23 keep the door for admissions open at the City  
24 College for New York once I was closed across the  
25 university. So we were taking in these veterans

1  
2 that were getting out just barely at the deadline  
3 and wanted to sign up for school. Because if they  
4 weren't able to enroll in school they would have  
5 to wait until spring semester and he was afraid  
6 we'd lose them then. The transition coming from  
7 the military and going straight into education,  
8 you're receiving GI Bill benefits, so in an ideal  
9 world, if the GI Bill was coming on time, they'd  
10 be able to get that money and not have to worry  
11 about where your next check is coming from.  
12 Because when you're in the military you have a  
13 guaranteed check to you and you don't have to  
14 worry about that. At the City College of New  
15 York, at the beginning of this semester, they  
16 provided us a space for veterans. We're pretty  
17 unique in that they gave us space for an office  
18 and also a lounge. That's crucial in order to  
19 create a veteran community, a rally point, if you  
20 will, for other veterans to get together in  
21 between classes. The peer to peer thing, veterans  
22 tend to flock to other veterans and they look out  
23 for each other just like in the military. You  
24 know, we take care of our own. So that's  
25 definitely a big part of retention is being able

1  
2 to make those connections with other veterans so  
3 they can look out for each other. And too, I  
4 think help on the upper level to provide the staff  
5 in order to help these veterans with paperwork  
6 once they come into school and to make sure  
7 everything is squared away with them. We just  
8 recently hired at the beginning of the semester, a  
9 veteran coordinator at City College to walk them  
10 through the paperwork and the bureaucratic red  
11 tape that veterans have to go through in order to  
12 enroll for school. When I first got there at the  
13 City College in the spring of 2009, I had to wait  
14 in line. It kind of felt like the DMV, going from  
15 one window, waiting about an hour and then going  
16 to the next. It's really annoying. So now we  
17 have the veteran coordinator to not to have to  
18 deal with that. Go to him and he'd take care of  
19 our paperwork and that would be that.

20 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: A quick  
21 aside. Sir, what happens to CUNY? It's good that  
22 you are allowing people to get out there. What  
23 happens to CUNY with a certain amount of the  
24 veterans who will not be eligible for benefits?  
25 Who eats that? Is my question clear? I'll do it

1  
2 again. Every veteran may not be eligible for  
3 benefits. You are accepting all veterans in at  
4 their word. A certain portion, God willing less  
5 than 1% or some variation, will be ruled  
6 ineligible for whatever reason. What happens to  
7 the money that you have expended? Who eats that?  
8 Who is responsible for that? Is that put on that  
9 veteran? Is the Veterans Administration? Does  
10 CUNY have to eat it and if they do, is that  
11 something that we need to fighting over now  
12 because it may be monies out of CUNY's budget that  
13 you don't have?

14 PETER JORDAN: If I understand your  
15 question, a scenario might be that a veteran who  
16 is waiting for the disbursement of benefits finds  
17 out that not all of those benefits are  
18 forthcoming. And yet, at one of our campuses we  
19 have allowed this student to enroll pending that  
20 disbursement. In that particular case, we would  
21 handle it on a case by case basis. But what is  
22 also available to all students; including student  
23 veterans include financial aid counseling. That  
24 financial aid counseling focuses not only on  
25 veteran benefits for federal and state aid, but it

1  
2 also focuses on the kinds of financial aid  
3 initiatives that the City University of New York  
4 put into place to support students. Campuses  
5 through their foundations raise funds to support  
6 student scholarships. Those scholarships provide  
7 support for students who are having financial  
8 difficulty. This year the university also  
9 provided funding to support on campus or the  
10 expansion of on campus employment for students,  
11 which is the sort of self-help program. So one of  
12 the things that we'd be able to make available to  
13 a student in the scenario that you described would  
14 be an offer of on campus employment as a  
15 possibility. There are also payment plans that we  
16 can work through with students, helping them apply  
17 for low interest rate education loans as well.  
18 All of these are resources that we have available  
19 to us that we can counsel students through and do  
20 counsel students through.

21 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Chair Barron.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you very  
23 much, just a couple of quick questions. The  
24 certificate of enrollment, many veterans cannot  
25 get their benefits unless they have a certificate

1  
2 of enrollment and then some colleges don't allow  
3 the certificate of enrollment until the first day  
4 of classes even though the Veterans Administration  
5 will accept it two or three months before. Do we  
6 have any problems with that in CUNY? Are they  
7 allowed to get the certificate of enrollment prior  
8 to the start of classes for the sake of their  
9 veteran benefits?

10 WILFRED COTTO: We encourage the  
11 veteran as soon as he or she has that certificate  
12 of enrollment to go ahead and present that to the  
13 college, to the certifying official so that that  
14 person can go ahead and process his or her  
15 benefits. The sooner they do this the better.

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So they can  
17 get it prior?

18 WILFRED COTTO: Absolutely, not a  
19 problem. As long as they have been accepted, are  
20 enrolled, have registered and gone through all  
21 that process of enrollment, they can present that  
22 certificate of enrollment and their benefits will  
23 be processed.

24 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: The \$3,000  
25 stipend, what percentage of the veterans actually

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gets that? Is it all of them, half of them, the majority of them?

PETER JORDAN: For clarification, are you referring to the VA's emergency check?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes.

PETER JORDAN: That \$3,000 right?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes.

PETER JORDAN: All of them that are eligible in the system currently awaiting payment of are eligible to apply for that money. So if you are in the system and you have done everything that you were supposed to do in order to process your claim and you still haven't received any money because of the backlog, you are eligible for that \$3,000 emergency check.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Does that take a long time to come?

PETER JORDAN: Actually, no it does not. The VA, again, has tried to put things in place. You can walk over to 245 West Houston Street, the regional office and they will handwrite you a check.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I don't understand that. They can handwrite you an

1  
2 emergency check, why can't they just give you your  
3 money? That's confusing to me. If they can say  
4 here's the \$3,000, they can say here's the \$25,000  
5 you're supposed to get or here's the \$10,000,  
6 \$15,000. I don't understand that.

7 WILFRED COTTO: I think it goes  
8 back to your earlier question about the money. I  
9 believe the money is in place. The earlier  
10 question is it that they don't have the money, I  
11 think the money is there. The money is committed.  
12 I think the influx was overwhelming. I know  
13 Director Keith Wilson personally and he has been  
14 working on this for a while. He hired 750 some  
15 odd extra people just to help. He's authorized  
16 overtime, you know Saturdays and Sundays. I mean  
17 they're doing what they can.

18 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Has there been  
19 any discussion with you and the VA about  
20 streamlining the process? Maybe taking ten pieces  
21 of paper out that may not be necessary, because  
22 sometimes it's over bureaucratic and just a  
23 streamlining plan. It's interesting that you can  
24 say I'm in the process and I need an emergency  
25 check and get it. Is there any discussion to

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streamline that?

WILFRED COTTO: We had some earlier input into the actual process, yes. They went to the online processing of submitting the claim which was supposed to help and eliminate a lot of that paperwork. For ages they were doing it application and pen and ink kind of thing and mailing it out. So they have put some automation into the process which was supposed to help, but here we are still with this dilemma.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Some kind of online or e-processing of the application or something electronically that can expedite?

WILFRED COTTO: That's exactly what's in place right now, Mr. Chairman.

PETER JORDAN: There has to be a clarification. Post 9/11 GI Bill is what we're talking about, not the voc rehab which gives money or the other ones. So addressing that, those are the service members who can get access to that 3,000 which is going to be deducted later on, which we don't know how that's going to happen. However, the process of most of the student veterans that I have been talking to have applied,

1  
2 certified, had everything sent in and there are  
3 these either glitches because it hasn't really  
4 been set up yet. This thing started August the  
5 8th and it was over 200,000 veterans trying to  
6 access that money. As Mr. Cotto was saying, they  
7 didn't have enough staff to really handle that. I  
8 had the opportunity to go to an update of the GI  
9 Bill for certifiers and others who were interested  
10 in what's going on. It's really interesting.  
11 They are having a hard time themselves  
12 coordinating these monies that are due.

13 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I think I  
14 heard in your testimony that no students in CUNY,  
15 who are veterans, have been unable to continue  
16 their education because of the delay of this. Has  
17 that happened or has CUNY said we'll delay in  
18 receiving payment until you receive? If not, how  
19 many students have been affected by the delay?

20 PETER JORDAN: Not to our knowledge  
21 at this point. Through our Veterans Affairs  
22 offices and counseling offices are trying to make  
23 sure students are aware of the opportunities to  
24 have payments deferred once they're certified. To  
25 answer the question of how many students we've

1  
2 lost because they weren't able to make payment or  
3 they haven't received those payments, those are  
4 numbers that we don't have. But our efforts have  
5 been to make sure that we're communicating to  
6 counseling offices and veterans' offices.

7 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I just want to  
8 understand that a little better. There is no  
9 intent of CUNY to have any student not be able to  
10 attend college because of that delay.

11 PETER JORDAN: Because they can't  
12 access benefits, right.

13 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: But if the  
14 student themselves are not familiar with how to  
15 process that, so that's where there may be some  
16 that fall through the loops. But it's not because  
17 they couldn't continue.

18 WILFRED COTTO: If I may. Again,  
19 we're trying to do everything we can to facilitate  
20 and keep them in school awaiting payment, got that  
21 part. However, if the student gets to a point  
22 where he or she feels like, you know I've got all  
23 these other responsibilities, I've got these  
24 bills, I've got to do this, I've got to do that,  
25 that becomes an individual choice that now is

1  
2 affected by the delay of payment that goes to the  
3 student. That's why the emergency check was the  
4 right thing to do. A lot of these students were  
5 in dire need and at the brink of almost saying I'm  
6 done with school, regardless of what we were  
7 trying to do to keep them in. That \$3,000 up  
8 front kind of money, here you go, held it together  
9 for this semester and we're hoping that might next  
10 semester things will be rolling right along, but  
11 it's individual.

12 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, sir.

13 AUBREY ARCANGEL: You know it's  
14 tough on the student veteran to concentrate on  
15 their studies when they're worrying about their  
16 financial hardships. I've had all my guys tell me  
17 that once they received their \$3,000 emergency  
18 payment they spent it already on bills that were  
19 due. So through my campus we have the emergency  
20 loan that I spoke about in my testimony that helps  
21 out a little bit. But on my campus we haven't  
22 lost anyone yet. The buddy of mine that I spoke  
23 about, Brian, we tried getting him a part time job  
24 at an organization I worked with but so far  
25 they've been okay.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's one of  
3 my main concerns because in this whole process  
4 people can get lost if they don't know the process  
5 or if they're not aware of things that they have  
6 access to. That's very, very important to hear  
7 you say that no one has been lost and the numbers  
8 may be minimal, one is bad but still we're working  
9 on that. Let me just mention one other thing  
10 first. I hope everybody gets a copy of this  
11 article here because I've been trying to start a  
12 revolution in America for a long time and I think  
13 if there's any one I could start is with the  
14 prices of the textbooks. Textbook pricing is off  
15 the hook, it's outrageous. We had a hearing on it  
16 and I heard you mention the veterans have to pay a  
17 good share of their benefits to textbooks and they  
18 get some allocation for it. But textbook pricing  
19 is off the hook. It's just outrageous and there  
20 are about five publishing companies that  
21 monopolize the publishing of textbooks. Then  
22 there are four wholesale distributors, including  
23 Barnes and Noble who monopolize the wholesale  
24 distributing. There's a textbook that might  
25 really cost \$60 or \$65 in England. This is the

1 same textbook that you have to pay \$136 for here.  
2 And then when they bundle it with all the other  
3 stuff that you have to get, the CDs, it's like  
4 \$200 something dollars. And then there are  
5 certain professors that don't even know the cost  
6 of textbooks but they're assigning you to buy  
7 these textbooks. And then, don't let them put  
8 another sentence in the textbook next year because  
9 then it's a new edition. Then a textbook that you  
10 spent \$136 for, they buy it back from you for \$20  
11 or \$15 or \$10. It is outrageous. It is  
12 capitalism at its worst. Give me a handclap  
13 whether you like it or not. I had to do that when  
14 the Chairman left so I can not get in trouble. I  
15 want you all to sign up for our textbook movement.  
16 We're starting an affordable textbook campaign.  
17 I'm coming to every campus and we've got to get  
18 that moving. So we have the veteran students  
19 onboard with that. We're going to rock them on  
20 that one. Council Member Brewer.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you  
23 very much. I think there's class. Are there  
24 members of Ron Haybeck's [phonetic] class by  
25 chance? Professor?

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MALE VOICE: Raise your hand.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You didn't know that.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Say that there; you could have just done it for me. I saw Ron. I was allowing you to do that so you could get the credit.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That was fun. Thank you. I have the honor of having John Jay College in my district. There are many, many returning veterans there. When Commissioner Roger Newman was first appointed, we all went there for the opening. Some of you were there and sort of thanking him for his ongoing service. My question then and now, one of the major issues is timing because many veteran students also have to work. The problem is your class schedule may not fit your work schedule. So I'm wondering how you coordinate that. How are the Veterans Affairs or veteran student advisors able to help with that? The second question is housing. Is there any VA assistance here? We are trying with the Mitchell Lama program, what's left of it, to get priority. There is a priority I think for Vietnam. My

1  
2 husband is a Vietnam vet, so I hear a lot of this  
3 discussion. But I believe that there is no  
4 current priority for Mitchell Lama for current  
5 vets. I'm just wondering about the housing  
6 situation. Do you get any help; do you need help  
7 with that? How does HPD help? How does the state  
8 help? CUNY has a wonderful long distance  
9 learning, et cetera. I do not ever subscribe to  
10 everybody doing long distance learning. But there  
11 may be some classes online. Is that helpful to  
12 people? Is it not helpful to people? The final  
13 question is when we had Roger's reception or  
14 whatever it's called, I don't think there was a  
15 really effective club at that point but I believe  
16 at John Jay there is now. I don't remember your  
17 name sir, but you could run the world. The point  
18 of the matter is with you at City College  
19 everything is okay. I know you're a student but  
20 when you're done you will be running the world.  
21 My question is how many campuses have staff like  
22 this wonderful gentleman at BMCC, et cetera, club  
23 staff? Are they at all CUNY campuses, some CUNY  
24 campuses, what's the layout? Those are my  
25 questions.

1  
2 PETER JORDAN: Just coordinating  
3 our response here. To address your question about  
4 scheduling and I'll address as well the question  
5 of distance learning. The issue of scheduling is  
6 always a challenge for campuses, not just CUNY or  
7 public institutions, but private institutions as  
8 well. We are very fortunate within the City  
9 University of New York to have campuses that are  
10 committed to educating a very diverse student  
11 population and that include not just traditional  
12 college students but also nontraditional students  
13 who may be working adults as well. So you'll find  
14 that across our campuses there are evening and  
15 weekend programs as well and they're increasing  
16 because our student population is increasing and  
17 in order to accommodate those students we are  
18 starting classes at 6:30, 7:00 in the morning and  
19 going through until 10:00, 11:00 at night. In  
20 addition, weekends are becoming more and more  
21 useful in terms of accommodating schedules as  
22 well. Of course you mentioned distance learning  
23 or online offerings of courses so that there are  
24 opportunities to offer hybrid programs to students  
25 where they're not necessarily required to take

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2 five classes all of them meeting face to face, but  
3 they may have the option of taking one or two of  
4 those classes online as well. So those are  
5 efforts that are in place within CUNY and are  
6 being enhanced semester to semester to accommodate  
7 our students and that the university is committed  
8 to through its strategic planning process.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I  
10 appreciate that. I don't want to put one group  
11 over another because everybody has scheduling  
12 issues. But do the veterans get priority because  
13 of their hectic schedule? I just don't know. I'm  
14 just wondering. That did come up at Roger's  
15 reception. There were several veterans there who  
16 are students who said that was their primary  
17 concern.

18 PETER JORDAN: As I mentioned at  
19 the top of our testimony here, I'm the new kind of  
20 the block and I'm not using that as an excuse but  
21 this is information that I will take back and try  
22 to find out. But my sense having been for the  
23 last eight years as Chief Student Affairs Officer  
24 on a CUNY campus before coming to the central  
25 office is that we haven't had to set priorities

1  
2 according to groups until now. Now if there is a  
3 problem at John Jay I will want to find out more  
4 about that and I certainly will investigate it.

5 AUBREY ARCANGEL: To answer your  
6 question about priority. Before attending City  
7 College of New York, I was attending Borough of  
8 Manhattan Community College. While I was there we  
9 lobbied for priority registration for veterans. I  
10 don't know if that still stands today, but that  
11 was passed when I was there. That's also  
12 practiced at City College as well. So within the  
13 registration process it's lined up giving priority  
14 to those that are upper classmen, with higher GPAs  
15 and then it goes down. But there is a restriction  
16 for veterans at City College and BMCC. I don't  
17 know if that's university-wide.

18 ERIC GLAUDE: It's interesting that  
19 at BMCC we are extremely veteran friendly and that  
20 we have not structured a priority but whenever  
21 there is a veteran that may have even registered  
22 late or interested in getting in even after  
23 registration; we have actually gotten them in.  
24 That's what we are doing now and we're trying to  
25 make that activity official.

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2           AUGUST COLEMAN: I can answer your  
3 second question concerning housing. I do know  
4 currently that HUD has made a specific Section 8  
5 voucher for homeless veterans. At this point I  
6 don't know how many exactly have been used, but I  
7 know that it is a resource that veterans that I  
8 know have used to get housing.

9           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But for  
10 those who are not homeless and who hope not to be,  
11 it would be good to have some alternative.

12           AUGUST COLEMAN: You can still  
13 submit your documentation and it will go through a  
14 regular process of what you have and what you  
15 don't have for eligibility. Then they will place  
16 you by that.

17           WILFRED COTTO: Let me address the  
18 question about campus staffing and student veteran  
19 clubs. I was at that ceremony and I do remember.  
20 President Travis put me on the spot that day too.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I remember.

22           WILFRED COTTO: Remember that, to  
23 introduce the commissioner. Commissioner Roger  
24 Newman is an alum of John Jay College. John Jay  
25 College houses the largest population of student

1  
2 veterans within the CUNY system right now. It's  
3 coming close to 500 with this new push on the Post  
4 9/11 GI Bill. A lot of those students come from  
5 FDNY, NYPD, and Corrections. John Jay being a  
6 school of criminal justice, it attracts a lot of  
7 that paramilitary stuff and that's where they go.  
8 Currently the Borough of Manhattan Community  
9 College has just hired a full time person, Mr.  
10 Glaude. Queensborough Community College just  
11 hired another full time person, Ms. Peaches  
12 Diamond there. Brooklyn College has their  
13 announcement out as we speak in search of their  
14 full time person. The College of Staten Island is  
15 in the process of hiring another part time person.  
16 They have one part time person who can't do a full  
17 time job, but they want to hire another part time  
18 in order to augment that. City Tech is looking  
19 for someone. City College just hired someone and  
20 a number of others are starting to put their job  
21 descriptions and announcements online because this  
22 is why we allocated this funding directly to them  
23 this year in order for them to hire these  
24 individuals. So we've only been involved in this  
25 now three months in terms of the money being

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2 available for them to actually do this. So the  
3 progress is slow, but I'm happy with where we are.  
4 By this time next year we'll be 100%, you know,  
5 full time and part time hire.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do most of  
7 them have clubs even if they don't have staff?

8 WILFRED COTTO: Right. So that's  
9 where the students themselves and student leaders  
10 come in. When I define a person as full time or  
11 part time, I mean this is what they do, you know  
12 veterans affairs coordination of. We have a  
13 person at each campus that within his or her  
14 portfolio does some veteran stuff, not full time,  
15 not part time, just maybe a portion. So this  
16 individual could be a faculty member, it could be  
17 a staff person and he or she helps organize the  
18 club and serves as that faculty adviser. So we  
19 have clubs at all our community colleges. I think  
20 there are maybe one or two senior colleges that  
21 have not yet drawn up the petition and the things  
22 that are needed in order to actually formalize  
23 that club. So we're in a good place right now.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Because  
25 when I was going to John Jay the other day, as I

1  
2 do almost once or twice a week for an event, they  
3 were actually handing out recruitments for the  
4 clubs. I thought that was very helpful.

5 WILFRED COTTO: And again with  
6 Peggy Burnett there now and she's kind of taking  
7 the lead along with Sean, Julie and they're taking  
8 the lead on that with the support of the students.  
9 So they're finally organizing and getting things  
10 ready.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: My final  
12 question, what's the breakdown of men and women in  
13 terms of the CUNY student veterans?

14 ERIC GLAUDE: I can only speak for  
15 the Borough of Manhattan, but right now we have 35  
16 women veterans either active or veterans. What  
17 we're doing, if I can just put this plug in, we're  
18 trying to set up a day of pampering to get more to  
19 come in. So they'll be able to go to a spa for  
20 the entire day thanks to the funding. You're  
21 invited.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You could  
23 get sued for discrimination probably. I'm just  
24 teasing.

25 ERIC GLAUDE: We're going to make

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sure the women do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm just teasing. Council Member Sanders will be upset he doesn't get to go.

WILFRED COTTO: This is just a guesstimate just anecdotally, maybe one-third are female veterans, maybe 30%.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It sounds like at City College you've got it down pat. But in general do you feel like you're doing enough on the retention, or you'll let Commissioner Newman know what else you need to do. In other words, the retention is the issue. Obviously you're doing recruitment but retention is always the issue.

WILFRED COTTO: Just a point of clarification. City College is doing well. I've got 16 other colleges that are doing just as well. I'm very proud of them.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, just that he's here.

WILFRED COTTO: Hostos is represented and so is BMCC and so we are CUNY and I have to put that plug in because that's how I

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think.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Retention.

WILFRED COTTO: Retention is an issue. We will reach out not only to the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, the VA, the City Council, whoever we need to in order to help us with this retention piece because we're serious about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: We have come to the end of this hearing. I want to thank my colleagues for taking the time to look in on this very important issue, what happens to our veterans, what is going on with them right now. I want to draw attention that even as we speak, we have a class from CUNY I'm told, BMCC is here.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I already introduced them.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: You did? Gale, you think of everything. I think that this is good. I'm glad that you are here and you saw democracy in action. I look forward to sitting on the other side of this mike and seeing some of you

1  
2 in the near future sitting on this side of the  
3 table. I also want to thank my colleague, Council  
4 Member and Chair Barron for seeing the importance  
5 of this issue. I'm sure he differs with me, but I  
6 understand that all of the seemingly love ends as  
7 soon as you become a veteran. I'm sure that he's  
8 more pro-VA position but I'll leave that alone for  
9 the moment.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You know you  
11 aren't leaving that.

12 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I'm sure his  
13 conservative spirit is most unnerving but that's a  
14 different story. I urge the VA to get right. I  
15 urge the Veterans Administration to do everything  
16 in their power to clear this up. We know that  
17 there will be a certain amount of people who will  
18 fall away, who will drop away. We do not need  
19 them to spend a good 5, 10, 15 years of wandering  
20 when we can do some work right now. I also  
21 encourage the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs  
22 to be more active and proactive on this issue. I  
23 want to commend CUNY for showing the way again,  
24 just showing the way in terms of what people  
25 should with the veteran population and how we

1  
2 should do it. I think that New York City should  
3 really consider exporting that knowledge. We have  
4 a reservoir. We may end up solving our budget  
5 problems if we were to look in-house and export  
6 that. I will give the last word grudgingly to my  
7 colleague the conservative Council Member Barron.

8 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you very  
9 much. Can't we all get along? I must say this,  
10 although both tried to take credit for CUNY, I am  
11 the Chair of the Higher Education, of CUNY. That  
12 is my family that they tried so hard to just take  
13 from me and it can't happen. That's number one.  
14 Number two, I notice that our request to have CUNY  
15 come, not only did they come, they came  
16 impressively. They came providing leadership for  
17 the city. I suggest my radical colleague use his  
18 subpoena power to subpoena the Mayor's Office of  
19 Veteran Affairs to come. If the subpoenas work on  
20 the federal level, subpoena the VA to come and  
21 your buddy here will join you in that battle, but  
22 I need your leadership. I need you to lead it.  
23 Let's have a hearing number two and subpoena them  
24 because we do have subpoena power. I thank you  
25 very much. It's good to see all of you. We had a

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wonderful hearing thanks to CUNY.

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CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Sir, you did

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very well. This hearing is now ended.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Donna Hintze certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature *Donna Hintze*

Date November 6, 2009