

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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February 7, 2017
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.
17th Fl

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Fernando Cabrera
Alan N. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone
Joseph C. Borelli

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

Dr. Loree Sutton, Commissioner
Department of Veteran Services

Chair Haskins, Chair
Veterans Advisory Board

Adrienne Braimer
New York City Veterans Alliance

Dan McSweeney, Founding President
United War Vets Council

2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [gavel] Okay, good
4 afternoon. My name is Eric Ulrich. I serve as the
5 chair of the Committee on Veterans. Thank you for
6 attending today's hearing on the Veterans Advisory
7 Board. Today, we'll be discussing the findings of
8 the 2016 Annual Report of the Veterans Advisory Board
9 or more commonly known as the VAB, which consists of
10 11 veterans who serve three-year terms, six of whom
11 are appointed by the Mayor, five of whom are
12 appointed by the Speaker of the Council. The VAB has
13 a mandate to advise the Commissioner of the
14 Department of Veteran Services on all matters
15 concerning veterans in New York City. The members of
16 the Board represent the five boroughs of New York
17 City and all of them have served in the one of the
18 branches of the armed services. The Board is
19 required to meet at least once every quarter, record
20 its deliberations and submit an annual report on its
21 activities. Last year the board met five times once
22 in each borough and tackled the wide variety of
23 issues that range from hiring at the Department of
24 Veterans Services to reductions in veteran
25 homelessness and the establishment of Veterans

2 Treatment Courts in Manhattan Staten Island. This
3 year's report contains several specific suggestions
4 as to the direction of the new department both in the
5 short term as it reaches its full operational
6 capacity, and over the long term as it looks to
7 establish itself as the best city level department of
8 its kind in the country. I'm look forward to
9 discussing the board's findings with other elected
10 officials, members of the committee and advocates
11 this afternoon. I'd like to thank the Veterans
12 Advisory Board for their thoughtful and substantive
13 recommendations it has provided both to the Council
14 and to the Administration. It has been and continues
15 to be an important advocate for program services and
16 initiatives that support veterans and their families
17 and their continued service as citizens. I'd also
18 like to thank the committee staff, our Counsel Nicole
19 Abene, Policy Analyst Michael Kurtz; Financial
20 Analyst John Russell and my Legislative Director Mary
21 Prentis, and I know the other members of the
22 committee are on their way. There are several other
23 committees that are meeting at this time, but first
24 we will hear from the Commissioner of Department of
25 Veteran Services, Dr. Loree Sutton. Okay.

2 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right
3 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
4 truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony
5 today and to answer Council Member questions
6 honestly? Thank you. [pause]

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Hello. Good
8 afternoon, Chair Ulrich and members of the Committee
9 on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton, and I am
10 honored to serve as the Commissioner of the New York
11 City Department of Veteran Services. Thank you for
12 this opportunity to meet and address today's
13 oversight hearing on the Veterans Advisory Board. I
14 would like to thank all of you for your commitment to
15 continually pushing forward the needs of our veterans
16 and their families. As you know, it was through
17 collaboration between this City Council, the Mayor
18 the City of New York and veteran advocates that made
19 2016 such a historic year for members of our
20 military, transitioning into productive and
21 fulfilling post-service lives as well as for all
22 generations of New York City veterans. It bears
23 repeating that our veterans and their families are
24 extraordinary civic assets whose continued leadership
25 and service on behalf of others strengthen the social

2 fiber of our city. Most notably, New York City's
3 transitioned the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs
4 into a full citywide agency specifically devoted to
5 the wellbeing and support of veterans and their
6 families now know as the New York City Department of
7 Veteran Services, a/k/a/ DVS. Since the passage of
8 historic legislation by the New York City Council and
9 the subsequent signing of Local Law 113 by Mayor de
10 Blasio over a year ago, DVS has grown in vision,
11 scope and capacity as we build the strongest
12 foundations possible for connection veterans and
13 their families with high quality services across a
14 variety of needs, and strengthening their capacity
15 for and commitment to continued service within our
16 city. Looking back, 2016 was a year of
17 collaboration, engagement with veterans and families
18 from all generations, constructive partnership and
19 historic achievement for DVS. These efforts are
20 briefly summarized including the below, facilitating
21 enhanced access to services and benefits specifically
22 for veteran New Yorkers by being the first city in
23 the nation to honor the service of our veterans by
24 adding a veteran designator to a Municipal ID Card
25 Program known as IDNYC. Improving access to veteran

2 benefits by placing Community Outreach Specialists to
3 serve as a direct link between the community in each
4 borough and DVS by providing the human element of
5 one-on-one support. Working with the first lady
6 Chirlane McCray's Mental Health Initiative, Thrive
7 NYC, a pioneering initiative that is designed to
8 erode stigma, foster engagement and connect
9 individuals to community resources and professional
10 services. DVS's Core4 Whole Health Model aims to
11 address the full impact of war, mind, body and spirit
12 for our veterans and their families by applying a
13 peer based community approach that increases
14 engagement while lowering stigma and cost. We are
15 truly privileged to be part of this pioneer
16 initiative. Formulating DVS' strategy for recruiting
17 and connecting veterans and their families to city
18 careers, services and resources through a phased
19 action plan aimed at upgrading the DVS website for
20 direct access city job opportunities, collaborating
21 with DCAS citywide recruitment and Workforce 1 in the
22 public and private sectors to identify human
23 resources, best practices, standardizing citywide
24 intake forums to promote self-identification of
25 veterans and families and exploring ways to engage

2 with the veterans business community to enhance
3 business and procurement opportunities for veteran
4 business owners and entrepreneurs. This initiative
5 is ongoing and will formerly launched later this
6 year. Launching Vet Connect NYC a digital platform
7 and portal as well as a coordinated service network
8 connecting veterans and their families with
9 comprehensive referrals, counseling, and benefit
10 support across a growing constellation of service
11 providers. Currently, we are in the final phase of
12 completing the procurement requirements for this
13 negotiated acquisition. Vet Connect NYC launch is
14 anticipated in spring of 2017. Collaborating with
15 the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York to establish and
16 maintain strategic partnerships with private
17 entities, non-profit organization and foundations to
18 generate support and foster bold investments designed
19 to plug gaps in services, test, pilot and scale,
20 innovative new programs, and leverage the flexibility
21 of the private sector to support our public
22 initiatives all aimed at empowering New York City
23 veterans and families of all generations. Working
24 toward Functional Zero by ending homelessness for
25 veterans currently in shelter and developing a rapid

2 rehousing system for housing new veterans within 90
3 days of entry while also mitigating recidivism by
4 bolstering after care services through a dedicated
5 coordinator who will drive assessment priorities and
6 it fully leverages the Vital Veteran Peer Coordinator
7 role. Continuing DVS collaboration with the Mayor's
8 Office of Special Projects and Community Events,
9 Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and
10 Management, and Veteran service organization partners
11 to assist and organize major veterans commemorative
12 ceremonies and special events that honor service.
13 It's truly extraordinary how far our city has come.
14 At times I find it surreal and always humbling at not
15 only the level of support we have seen from veterans,
16 this City Council, this Committee on Veterans, the
17 Mayor and Veterans service organizations how that
18 support has materialized in some very real gains for
19 our transitioning service members, and their
20 families. The aforementioned initiatives and
21 progress are just the beginning as we are embarking
22 upon the next chapter of our historic journey
23 advocating for and enfranchising New York City
24 veterans and their families. I want to take a brief
25 opportunity in particular to thank Mayor de Blasio,

2 Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chair Ulrich and the members
3 of this Committee on Veterans, family members of our
4 military service members and veterans with special
5 recognition for our gold store-gold star families who
6 have paid such a dear price. Civic leaders and
7 concerned citizens who embrace the social and moral
8 contract to serve those who have served us, members
9 of Teen DVS, many of whom are with-with us today as
10 well as so many friends of DVS serving in City Hall,
11 this City Council, across the government, city
12 officials, agency leaders, service providers and
13 lastly our New York City Veterans advocates whose
14 pioneering voices of the New York City veteran
15 community have quoted our veterans a distinct and
16 tangible connection to government such as has never
17 been seen in this city before. As this new year 2017
18 rolls forward, I-I-I eagerly look forward to renewed
19 partnership in this inaugural year for DVS. I
20 applaud you all. Most germane to today's hearing I
21 would like to address the work of the Veterans
22 Advisory Board whose counsel and advice I have come
23 to rely on as a finger of the pulse of our veterans
24 community. Appointed by Mayor de Blasio and Speaker
25 Mark-Viverito the VAB was strategically selected to

2 sustain a diverse range of service backgrounds,
3 community engagement interests and professional
4 expertise to help facilitate dialogue with the New
5 York City veterans community. Since its inception in
6 1987 under Local Law 53, the VAB's role has evolved
7 considerably in ways that have strengthened their
8 credibility, outreach and impact. In 2002, we
9 witnessed changes to increase their membership, an
10 initial five to nine members. In 2006, annual
11 reporting requirements as well as official leadership
12 structure in meeting frequency rules were adopted.
13 We have seen remarkable leadership of the VAB since
14 its inception, the first chair being General Richard
15 Colt in 2007 followed by Vince McGowan who was
16 elevated in 2008 and remained in this position until
17 April of 2015. We are pleased to have his successor
18 Todd Haskins with us here today assumed the chair
19 since Vincent's departure, and I am grateful to
20 former Chair McGowan for his continued willingness to
21 share his expertise, wisdom and informal guidance
22 whenever needed. Chair Haskins has done an amazing
23 job working with his fellow VAB officers and members,
24 and we do look forward to his continued leadership in
25 collaboration with the VAB. In keeping with the core

2 values strategic vision of the Mayor as well as the
3 Speaker, the appointed and reappointed VAB members
4 represent a divers range of service experiences
5 across several areas of service, a broad expanse of
6 occupational domains and life experiences to include
7 the public, private and social profit sectors
8 spanning academia, business or its health and
9 entrepreneurship. The current members is Todd
10 Haskins, Chair; Samuel Innocent, Vice Chair; Joe
11 Bellow, Secretary. Members: Patrick Divine, Charles
12 Grineski (sp?), Charles Hernandez, Mariel Juarez,
13 Jules Martin, Windy McClinton, Tony Odierno and John
14 Rowan. In March of 2015, Mayor de Blasio signed
15 Local Law 24 expanding the Board to 11 members and
16 required that each have an email address for board
17 activity. In the same year, Mary de Blasio signed
18 Local Law 25 to require the board to meet a minimum
19 of five times a year to hold at least one meeting in
20 each borough. This law also requires that a notice
21 of each public meeting be for provided in accordance
22 with the public notice requirements of the Public
23 Officers Law, recording a broadcast of each public
24 meeting in accordance with the New York City Charter,
25 and inclusion of VAB policy and legislative

2 recommendations for the Mayor's Office and the City
3 Council in the VAB annual report, which is available
4 on the DVS website.

5 In 2016, the VAB held four meetings in
6 the borough halls of Queens, Brooklyn and Staten
7 Island, and one at DVS headquarters at 1 Center
8 Street, New York. These rotating VAB meetings
9 throughout the boroughs has enable the VAB to provide
10 increased access and advise to DVS on community
11 issues of importance as well provide an invaluable
12 clearing house for borough specific veteran needs.
13 The VAB's decision to post its annual schedule months
14 in advance will enable veterans to provide advance
15 notification to the community to maximize public
16 engagement and transparency. DVS and the VAB enjoy a
17 relationship of support and communication. As DVS
18 Commissioner, I have regularly engaged with the VAB,
19 and in particular with Chair Bob Haskins on a number
20 of issues including the transitional process
21 establishing the new Department of Veterans Services,
22 key community concerns and interests, best practices
23 and recruiting and retaining veterans in the city
24 workforce, general regularly scheduled consultation
25 sessions between me and the VAB chair in

2 collaboration on identifying VAB agenda items and
3 access to executive briefings as requested. While
4 the VAB is an independent entity, we are proud to
5 work with its leaders and members in support of their
6 functional needs and infrastructure in whatever ways
7 they may request. In addition to hosting documents,
8 board information, minutes, videos, and past reports
9 and publications on the DBS website, we are pleased
10 to provide whatever technical and administrative
11 support is necessary. This assistance also includes
12 review of the inaugural bylaws created by the VAB in
13 2016 as well as guidance upon request about best
14 practices for smooth and insufficient implementation
15 of board and public meetings. I encourage everyone
16 to access the VAB 2016 End of Year Report and minutes
17 available on the DVS website. This End of Year
18 Report provides a series of 2016's Veterans
19 Highlights at the city level as well as some policy
20 and information gathering recommendations to the City
21 Council and the City of New York. As DVS is already
22 making strides with some of the recommendations
23 proffered, I look forward to evaluating and
24 discussing these recommendations with all partners
25 involved whether it be across agencies or await for

2 New York City Council. I greatly apprec—appreciate
3 the work that went into this document as it reflects
4 the passion and deep commitment towards moving the
5 interests forward and improving the lives of New York
6 City veterans and their families. Team DVS and the
7 VAB have worked intensively over these past several
8 months of transition and implementation of the VAB
9 legislative reforms to establish clear rules of
10 engagement, two-way channels of communication and
11 mutual roles of responsibilities. Whether figuring
12 out the logistics concerning VAB meetings, consulting
13 on questions of policy and potential legislation,
14 discussing the factors involved with expanding (sic)
15 of a separate agency, collaborating with community
16 meetings aimed at providing quality permanent housing
17 to veterans, or participating in community events of
18 local and national scope. The VAB has also provided
19 guidance and support for DVS' efforts on ending
20 veteran homelessness. Truly the VAB is commend—to be
21 commended for their work this past year including the
22 Annual Report. Off to a strong and promising start,
23 DVS and VAB are poised to achieve even more in 2017.
24 In closing, I would like to again thank Todd Haskins
25 for his leadership in taking the reigns as VAB chair

2 flanked by Vice Chair Samuel Innocent and Secretary
3 Joe Bellow and all the members of the Board for their
4 dauntless enthusiasm and passion in advocating for
5 our veterans. New York City veterans and their loved
6 ones deserve our best, and they are truly well
7 represented in the Veterans Advisory Board. Chair
8 Ulrich and members of the Committee on Veterans,
9 thank you again for your leadership and for this
10 opportunity to meet with you in this new year. At
11 this time, I am pleased to address your comments and
12 questions. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Commissioner Sutton,
14 thank you as always for your testimony and for being
15 with us today, and I want to take a moment to thank
16 the Administration. I received a call earlier this
17 morning. I know some folks were concerned about some
18 of the sort of ambiguous reductions in budget
19 reductions that were part of the Preliminary last
20 week, but the Administration assured me and several
21 of my colleagues that those cuts, on reasons that
22 were lightly would not go through, and that the
23 Mayor, in fact, wants to maintain every position in
24 your agency, current position in the agency.

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And—and Chair
3 Ulrich, if—if I could just say something here just to
4 clarify. They were not cuts. The FY17 Budget was
5 DVS' first budget as a new agency. The FY18
6 Preliminary Budget reflected the Year 1 start-up
7 costs: Equipment, furniture, things that would not
8 be renewed in year number 2, and you are correct that
9 announced today that we have identified some new
10 needs that we really didn't know existed last year,
11 but in the course of standing up our new agency we
12 are looking forward to implementing year 2 of
13 operations and to strengthening our distant programs
14 and taking things to the next level. So thank you
15 for your support.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you and we'll
17 be looking forward to the budget hearings that will
18 take place later in the spring before the Council
19 about the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. I do
20 want to take the opportunity to recognize so the
21 record can reflect we've been joined by Council
22 Member Borelli from Staten Island, Council Member
23 Maisel from Brooklyn and Council Member Cabrera from
24 the Bronx. Before we move onto the VAB, I know there
25 are other hearings going on simultaneously. I would

2 ask do any of my colleagues have any questions for
3 the Administration? Okay, and I know the—the Chair
4 of the Board has a deadline so I want to keep to
5 that. So Commissioner, thank you again for your
6 testimony, and we look forward to hearing from soon.

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Okay,
9 we'll now hear from the Chair of the Veterans
10 Advisory Board to present the Annual Report, Mr. Todd
11 Haskins. [pause] Mr. Chairman, at your leisure.

12 [pause]

13 TODD HASKINS: [off mic] Alright—[on mic]
14 Is that working? Okay, great. Chairman Ulrich,
15 members of the committee, Commissioner Sutton and
16 other attendees, let me first start by thanking this
17 committee both for holding this hearing today, but
18 more importantly for having the vision and foresight
19 to sponsor and drive the creating of the legislation
20 that paved the way for the establishment of the
21 Department of Veterans Services, the first new agency
22 in New York City in nearly a quarter of a century.
23 The significance of that cannot be understated. You
24 guys should all be very proud of what you have
25 achieved on behalf of—of the citizens of this city.

2 I'd also like to acknowledge roles of the Speaker and
3 the Mayor as well as the advocate community, which
4 Commissioner Sutton mentioned for the role both in
5 the legislation and ultimately in resourcing the
6 Department of Veterans Services. Let me take a step
7 back and provide a bit of context around how we as
8 the VAB interpret our mandate. We believe that our
9 obligation is to all New Yorkers not just to veterans
10 who live in New York. This is a critical point as it
11 colors the lens through which we evaluate policy.
12 We're not simply here to advocate for veterans.
13 That's—that's not our role. We've established a
14 vision for New York City to have the most effective
15 local veteran policies of any large city in the
16 nation. We're judicious in our recommendations. In
17 partnership with the DVS, we've concluded that our
18 policies will be most effective if prioritized based
19 upon how they support veterans' continued service as
20 citizens. This is our guiding principle. As a
21 result, all New Yorkers benefit from the investments
22 that we make in our veterans. It's logical to
23 question how these programs, which are clearly
24 targeted explicitly at veterans, impact all New
25 Yorkers, and to understand this, it's critical that

2 everyone understands the following points:

3 Regardless of whether you like veterans or not, and
4 most do like veterans, they are unique compared to
5 every other demographic group. First, they have
6 chosen to put themselves in harm's way for the
7 benefit of their fellow citizens, and that in its own
8 right merits our admiration and support, ensuring
9 that future generations of this country's best and
10 brightest continue to serve is critical to our
11 national security, and our collective success. For
12 validation of this concept look no further than to
13 the words of our first president who said, "The
14 willingness with which our young people are like to
15 serve in any war no matter how justified shall be
16 directly proportional to how they perceive veterans
17 if early awards were treated and appreciated by our
18 nation.

19 Second, veterans as a population have a
20 variety of attributes that that attract federal
21 spending and tourism to the city. So this is unique
22 to local veteran policy. For example, events like
23 Fleet Week, America's Parade and venues such as the
24 Intrepid, are all connected to veterans and all
25 generate tourism for the city. Also, the federal

2 government as we know has a variety of programs,
3 which are targeted at veterans, and bring federal
4 spending directly into our city. The most well know
5 of these programs is the GI Bill, but there are many
6 others that exist. The direct impact of these
7 programs is the easiest to quantify. The last—the
8 last benefit to the city is a bit more difficult to
9 evaluate. The wealth of demographic data suggests
10 that veterans make great citizens. Once they're
11 completed their transition, they are more civically
12 active, have lower unemployment, higher wages, higher
13 education, lower incarceration rates, higher average
14 earnings, and ultimately pay more taxes. These
15 attributes combined to have a compounding beneficial
16 effect over time if we attract more veterans to our
17 citizens. Let me give a crystal clear example of how
18 New York City's veteran policy has undeniably
19 provided great benefit to all New Yorkers more than
20 the cost in investment that we make in these
21 programs.

22 Mission Home is New York City's campaign
23 to end veteran homelessness. Since its inception,
24 veteran homelessness has dropped—homelessness has
25 dropped by over 90%—over 90%. That's despite an

2 increase in homelessness in the City overall. While
3 the city and its many partners have made significant
4 investments to bring about this success, the simple
5 fact is that the majority of the direct cost to
6 achieve this were funded by the federal government.
7 So whenever a qualifying veteran was placed in
8 permanent housing, federal dollars were paid to his
9 or her New York City landlord, which was then spent
10 in our city. Further, the cost to service that
11 otherwise homeless veteran, which was great burden on
12 the city is now removed. Lastly, that veteran who
13 was once on the street likely without a job can now
14 return to being a contributing member of society and
15 continue—and can continue his or her service as a
16 citizen. Sometimes the cost benefit analysis of
17 programs that we consider in the government can be
18 difficult to success—to assess, but for those which
19 we're prioritizing today, the returns are obvious and
20 immediate.

21 I'm not going to highlight six of the
22 recommendations in the report that I believe are the
23 most pressing and will have the highest return on
24 investment. There's—there's a number of other great
25 programs in here, but these are probably the ones

2 that have the greatest immediate impact. The
3 Commissioner has built a great team, and is ready to-
4 to design and implement-implement these and other
5 programs. But the next big test of our commitment is
6 really the 2017 Budget process. First, contracting
7 capability. Contracting capability must be added to
8 the DVS and it's not currently provided in the
9 budget. No department can rely on outside service-
10 services for something as critical as contracting.
11 First, they will always be at the whim of whoever
12 controls that capability. Second, there are unique
13 attributes that members of the veterans community
14 often hold such as veteran service organization
15 designations. Contracting bodies that are not
16 familiar with these attributes and the documation-
17 documentation thereof, have a difficult time
18 understanding and funding these programs. It's
19 imperative that these resources be funded through the
20 budget process, and-and be added to the DVS.

21 Second, program evaluation. Resources
22 for program evaluation are critical and obvious. We
23 simply cannot have the most effective local veteran
24 policies if we have no resources to measure
25 effectiveness. With these resources in place, we'll

2 be able to minimize waste, and also importantly
3 quantify the value of our programs. Proving
4 effectiveness will allow us to attract more resources
5 to the city by demonstrating that we are good
6 stewards of those resources. We can also use federal
7 money to perfect programs among our veterans
8 population, and then apply the best practices learned
9 to ensure that our New York City tax dollars are
10 spend most efficiently within the city. This another
11 way that all New Yorkers benefit from effective
12 veteran programs.

13 Next, Communications. Communications are
14 the single most urgent are of improvement where the
15 resources have already been provided. There's
16 probably some additional funding needs that are
17 likely, but DVS needs to make this a priority, and I
18 know the Commissioner is focused on it. This should
19 include both communicating within the city and its
20 veterans, but also communicating our successes beyond
21 the city's borders. Effective external
22 communications will ensure that all of our partners
23 know of our effectiveness, and again attract more
24 resources to the city.

2 Next, Vet Connect. Vet Connect as-as the
3 Commissioner noted is an innovative platform through
4 which all of the New York City veteran services will
5 be coordinated. We believe that we've identified the
6 right partners, but it will be critical that all the
7 funding need to complete the program is provided.
8 This is the backbone of our delivery model, and if
9 it's not done right, unnecessary waste will result.
10 Note that the partners are identified, but the
11 contracts are not yet complete. This highlights
12 again point one why establishing contracting
13 authority is so important.

14 Five, Veteran Owned Business Preference.
15 This-this is simple and frankly this sit I believe in
16 the City Council's court. Extend the minority of
17 Women Owned Business Enterprise programs to veteran
18 owned businesses. Literally, all that has to be
19 changed is the definition of minority owned to
20 include veterans. So the cost of this program is
21 essentially zero. This leads to an almost infinite
22 return.

23 The last program is Vets on Campus NYC.
24 I want to highlight an exciting opportunity for what
25 I believe is probably the highest return program

2 after the homelessness—after Mission Home that's yet
3 to be created. New York City is the largest exporter
4 of post-secondary education of any city in the
5 nation. We have more people who are not from New
6 York who come to New York City to go to school. We
7 have tremendous educational institutions here both
8 public and private and also vocational, colleges and
9 universities. Few opportunities to improve the lives
10 of Americans are so widely celebrated and noted as
11 post-secondary education, and this is very much in
12 align with our guiding principle of supporting
13 veterans' continued service to citizens. What's even
14 more amazing here is the fact that the federal
15 government will pay for all of this. Let me say that
16 again: The federal government will pay for veterans
17 to go to school in New York City. What does this
18 mean for the city? For every qualifying veteran who
19 completes a four-year degree here, the federal
20 government will spend approximately \$200,000 directly
21 in New York City between tuition costs and housing
22 costs. If that veteran chooses to stay in the city
23 upon graduation, that could literally be worth
24 millions of dollars of economic benefit over the life
25 of the veteran. Millions of dollars. Why every city

2 in the nation is not clamoring to attract veterans I
3 have no idea, but New York City should be the first.
4 We should work with all New York City based schools
5 and create a comprehensive program to attract
6 veterans. This would include an ad campaign
7 encouraging transitioning veterans to come and study
8 in-in New York City. Such a campaign can tap into
9 the spirit of adventure that caused many service
10 members to join the military in the first place.
11 This will have the added benefit of branding New York
12 City as veteran friendly-friendly and a leader in
13 veteran policies back to my consistent theme here
14 will attract more federal spending and tourism to,
15 you guessed it, New York City. Once we complete, you
16 know, once we attract these veterans to study here,
17 we must be prepared to support them. So additional
18 resources should be added particularly to public
19 institutions to ensure that veterans are supported on
20 campus and can succeed. We should also offer a
21 housing voucher to veteran who receive the GI Bill
22 who agree to serve as mentors supporting other
23 veterans. This will reinforce our guiding principle
24 of supporting veterans' continued service to
25 citizens. A program such as this will set New York

2 City apart from all others as a magnet for
3 transitioning veterans. Our belief is that all of
4 this will be more than paid for with the commerce
5 generated by the GI Bill money spend here. There's a
6 number of other initiatives as I mentioned that are
7 highlighted in the report each of which I believe
8 stand on their own. These six we believe are the
9 highest returning ones, and I'm happy to-to take any
10 questions on any of these policies, anything in the
11 report or any other topics you'd like to cover.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And that concludes
13 your testimony. Thank you Chair Haskins. I-I just
14 want to first thank you and the members of the VAB.
15 I know how hard and how long they worked on preparing
16 this report, and putting it together, and I
17 appreciate you sending it to the members of this
18 committee in advance so that we could give it a
19 careful review, and a read before today's hearing so
20 that we could ask some questions. And the amount of
21 work that actually went into this I-I-I have to say
22 that compared to, you know, previous reports in years
23 past many years ago, where they basically just gave
24 us the minutes from every meeting-meeting that the-
25 the VAB had, this really is just A+ and I-I don't

2 think you left any stone uncovered. You mention in
3 your testimony, and I want to sort of expound on the
4 point about the student veterans. I recently had the
5 opportunity to meet with some student veterans from
6 BMCC, and I know that they're—they haven't met with
7 the Commissioner. I know they're in the process of
8 setting it up, and they brought something to my
9 attention that even I was unaware of that CUNY
10 veterans—CUNY students who are former service members
11 who do get the GI Bill, and do have a certificate of
12 eligibility for whatever reason have a very difficult
13 time finding housing or, you know, rent—renting
14 apartments because landlords simply don't know what
15 the Certificate of Eligibility is and what it means,
16 and how much it's actually worth. They want to see
17 pay stubs or bank statements, but that is not
18 something that, you know, student veterans can get so
19 easily, and some of them for whatever reason don't
20 have any if they're not working and they're full-time
21 students. So, we're going to be taking a look into
22 that, and to the housing aspect because certainly if
23 the federal government is going to help pay the
24 rents, and they're paying the tuition, we want those
25 student veterans not only to come and study here, but

2 to stay here, as you mentioned. So, we'll be working
3 very closely with the Administration to identify
4 that. I have a few questions, but before I do, we
5 have ten minutes. So I'm going to give four minutes
6 for any of my colleagues because I know you have to
7 leave. So, I think Council Member Cabrera signed up
8 first, and we've also been joined by Council Member
9 Vallone.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you to the
11 Chair and thank you to for all you do for this
12 committee, and to veterans. I have to concur with
13 the Chair that this is--this is a very extensive and
14 very thoughtful briefing that you gave us. A quick
15 question and a one-minute question--

16 TODD HASKINS: [interposing] Sure.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --INSTEAD OF 12
18 minutes. We don't even need the four minutes, Mr.
19 Chair. Can you flesh out a little bit for me the
20 whole idea of program evaluation? So many times we
21 think just because we have a great idea that it
22 actually works, and what would that look like? Are
23 we also comparing it to other program affiliations
24 that have been done nationwide or do we have

2 something innovative here? What would that look
3 like?

4 TODD HASKINS: Yeah, let me—let me try
5 and give you an example, and—and frankly we need to
6 source out of it further exactly what it looks like
7 in terms of is it one body or four? Some of the
8 details that need to be—need to be determined, but
9 I'll give you an example. Undeniable success Mission
10 Home, but there's a bunch of data that we don't yet
11 have quantified about how—how much of a success, how
12 many federal dollars were spent here in New York City
13 housing our—our—our homeless veterans. How much
14 cost—how much direct cost of supporting homeless
15 people was—was created by virtue of these programs?
16 And so not having—not having the capability to
17 collect that data and evaluate it is an example of—of
18 where, you know, program evaluation and additional
19 resources specifically dedicated to—to understand how
20 we're doing and how we could do it better, you know,
21 how that—you know, how would work and how that would
22 be implemented.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Well, thank you
24 so much, and just wanted to—to just to start thinking
25 about, and I'm sure you already have what that matrix

2 would look like, and what variables we need to look
3 at. Thank you so much. [squawking mic]

4 TODD HASKINS: Yes, absolutely.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Excellent.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you,
7 Council Member Cabrera. I also just got a tap on the
8 shoulder. Council Member Vallone has a few questions
9 and then I'll wrap it up and hopefully we'll be able
10 to get you out of here in time.

11 TODD HASKINS: [interposing] And I'll
12 stay as long as you want to.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, I know, but I-
14 -

15 TODD HASKINS: [interposing] It's no
16 problem.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --I want to be
18 respectful of your time, and--and you being here. So
19 thank you again.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you,
21 Chair, and I promise I'm going to continue on in the
22 four minutes that my fellow council members have.
23 Just thank you. We have, as the Chair had said, I
24 think the lawyer side of me also appreciates seeing
25 briefing papers that are fully detailed. To you and

2 all the members that here of the board, it is a-not
3 only a breath of fresh air, but it's-it's such an
4 immediate next step, and I think the greatness of
5 creating the agency is the first step of changing on
6 the board and keeping some of the old with the new.
7 These are the parameters to set forward for the
8 future success. What I want to give you was an
9 opportunity to say what are the tools would you like
10 the Council to do for the board going forward? Is
11 there anything else in-that we can do to assist you
12 in your endeavor as Chair?

13 TODD HASKINS: Yeah, look, I-I think
14 that-to be perfectly honest as it relates to the
15 operations of the board, I think-I think they're
16 quite effective and efficient. You know, as-as the
17 current relationship with the Department of Veterans
18 Services is very collegial and very collaborative in
19 that context and so under that-under arrangement then
20 we get all of the direct support that we need. I
21 think if-if there were ever to be a less
22 collaborative relationship with the DVS, then-then we
23 might need other sorts of, you know, whether it's
24 program dollars to support meetings or-or otherwise,
25 but I think under the current structure we're in-

2 we're in reasonably good shape. The one thing that
3 we—that we have contemplated and you alluded to just
4 the volume of sort of work that—that goes into doing
5 this thoughtfully, and this wasn't tabulated in the
6 report. So it's—it's more—it's more in the idea
7 phase, but some sort of a—a stipend or otherwise to
8 allow a—almost an intern to help support some of this
9 policy development because, you know, we all have
10 full-times and full-time roles, and—and something
11 like that might be an interesting way to get some
12 more, you know, great thought leadership out of one
13 of our great universities here—and one the--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
15 There are some great opportunities, too.

16 TODD HASKINS: Yeah, exactly. We have
17 great learning points for that as well.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you very
19 much.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you,
21 Council Member Vallone. I'm going to wrap up with a
22 few questions for the committee. First up, again I
23 just—I was just so impressed with the detail that
24 this report went into. You and your colleagues and I
25 know that you don't work on this alone, every member

2 of the VAB contributes in some way. They really did
3 their homework on some of these issues particularly
4 with Veterans Treatment Courts, and we know how
5 effective these alternatives to incarceration
6 programs are, and we know that even the model of
7 Veterans Treatment Courts, but the mentorship is now
8 being applied to—because it's so successful—to other
9 disciplines and other specialty courts. So that's
10 really great, but there is an inconsistency in the
11 application of the courts and what cases get referred
12 and that is out of my jurisdiction and certainly you
13 can do nothing about it. But you even mentioning in
14 the report I think is meaningful and very important
15 for those veterans who do find themselves involved in
16 the Criminal Justice System, and I look forward to
17 the day when all veterans are treated equally in ever
18 borough by our Criminal Justice System and by the
19 five district attorneys. So I do want to give you
20 shout-out for that. I—I actually had a--a question
21 more about the meetings, the VAB meetings because I
22 don't get a chance to attend all of them. I know
23 that you do, and you've done a great job of meeting
24 in different boroughs, but who actually turns out at
25 these meetings? What type of veterans or people that

2 care about veterans who comes to these meetings, and-
3 and what questions do they ask? How do they
4 participate? Can you walk me through some of that--

5 TODD HASKINS: [interposing] Sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --in the past year.

7 TODD HASKINS: Sure yeah, it's-it's
8 interesting. So-so one that that over the past year
9 has changed. The-the attendance has changed pretty
10 markedly. I think there were close to 50 attendees
11 at the last meeting, and I think in some of the first
12 meetings it was more like 10. It's-it's a broad
13 range of participants. Everyone from-every-every
14 type of-of individual from-individual veterans who
15 are at a-I dare say at a breaking point. They're at
16 a loss in terms of finding services, and-and they
17 asked in the-in the public session for everyone's
18 benefit we have a-a public session where anyone can
19 ask a question. They're ask very personable-personal
20 issues in the public session, which I think, you
21 know, which frankly aren't necessarily appropriate
22 for that forum, but just highlights some of the
23 challenges that they're have-that they're having in
24 terms of getting-getting access to treatment and-and
25 otherwise, and then on the very end of the spectrum

2 we have, you know, heads of--heads of direct service
3 providers, head of BSOs, business people. You know,
4 people from all walks of life, and it really is a--a
5 broad range. One of the things that we aim to do
6 differently this year recognizing some of those
7 unusual questions literally just as an example
8 somebody asked why did I get a 30% disability rating
9 instead of 100%? And I can tell you I had no idea,
10 obviously. We--we are working with the VA to try and
11 bring relevant leaders of various service verticals
12 for--for the VA to actually join and attend the
13 meetings, and what we're going to do with the outside
14 of the meeting is--is try to highlight and educate our
15 attendees at that meeting that if they have a
16 personal issue or an issue of a personal nature,
17 we'll try to direct them to the actual direct service
18 providers, or at least to the people who can help
19 coordinate service so that we can help steer them in
20 the right direction. And then we can focus more of
21 the questions, a little bit more of the policy or
22 other related issues during the public session.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I--I think that's
24 really great, really great to know that most of the
25 feedback that you receive from, you know, average New

2 Yorkers or veterans that attend these meetings are—
3 are casework related, in fact, and I think that is a—
4 is a call for us for policymakers and for decision
5 makes to do more in that area to help our—with—
6 veterans with these issues, not only with the VA but
7 other issues that they may be having. So that's
8 really great to know, and the attendance is also—
9 that's also we're very pleased to hear that. I think
10 that is a feather in your cap to taking the meetings
11 to different boroughs, and making sure that we get
12 the word out there, and if we can be helpful in any
13 way, we want to help facilitate that. What I would
14 ask for the VA would be in addition to this—this
15 report. It's wonderful that the Administration and
16 the Council are now in receipt of it, but the work
17 continues, as you know. And we are now going into
18 year 2, but really it's the first full year of budget
19 hearings where the Council will have a charter
20 mandated role in, you know, asking the Administration
21 about the budget that the Mayor proposing and what
22 they're doing with the money and what they—what we
23 think that they could do better or what they're not
24 doing, et cetera. The VAB should feel free to
25 participate in those hearings. If not yourself, you

2 can certainly send one of the other members to
3 provide testimony if there's something throughout
4 this process that is organic or inorganic that is
5 related to this report or unrelated to the report
6 that you would want to see, you know, feel free to
7 send a one-page statement of support or opposition or
8 concern. The VAB is a very important independent
9 board that we rely on not only to produce an annual
10 report, but year round as we consider legislation and
11 pass the budget, which is the most important function
12 that we have as a body. So we'll have—last year we
13 had an Executive Budget hearing. This year we'll
14 have a Preliminary and an Executive Budget hearing
15 co-chaired with the Finance Committee, and this will
16 really be our chance to bring up some of the issues
17 that you had mentioned, and I've often cited about
18 the agency contracting officer. I think as time goes
19 by that's something that we'd like to see, and I know
20 the Administration has not shut the door to that but
21 certainly as they grow, and as they establish the
22 Department, that's something that we want to see
23 moving forward. And there may be other functions and
24 direct services that advocates or veterans want to
25 see the department do, and I think the VAB is—is sort

2 of like the Sandra Day O'Connor or the—the Supreme
3 Court. It's the swing vote, the independent honest
4 transparent sort of advisory role that—that we really
5 look to, that and to validate concerns or decisions
6 that are being made. So, I know that you had a 2
7 o'clock deadline and we went slightly over that, but
8 if you could—I know you didn't prioritize these in
9 any particular order, but which ones do you think are
10 really attainable? Which ones are like pie in the
11 sky? Give us the Reader's Digest pitch here.

12 TODD HASKINS: Look, I'd say I mean of—of
13 the six that are called out there, they're—they're
14 all readily attainable, readily attainable. I think
15 the—the five of the six are related to—I'd say
16 related to the—the—the DVS as it exists. You know,
17 the existing platform, the existing programs. We
18 have to be able to evaluate a program. This is just
19 common sense. We have to have contracting. That's
20 just common sense over time particularly as the
21 capability is built. As we think about what—how
22 should we be deploying resources, and what else
23 should we do, when you—when you look through the list
24 of things so many of them are—are—I—I can't help
25 myself that I am banker by training, and I look at

2 everything through a lens of economics, and you look
3 at the cost. If we spend \$5 million trying to
4 attract veterans to--to--which, by the way, is more
5 than the entire budget right now. Trying--just solely
6 trying to attract veterans to come and study in New
7 York City, we--we--we, you know, we need to check and
8 do some detailed math to figure out. I bet it will
9 more than pay for itself in terms of additional
10 economic benefit to the city, and I don't know if the
11 number is five or ten or two or three, but it's--it's
12 radically more than where we currently--where we
13 current--currently have funding.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And--and, you know,
15 maybe this is a conversation--and it's great that
16 we're starting it today--but the Administration, the
17 Council would be happy to facilitate a sit-down with
18 you and the members of your board, with some of the
19 folks from CUNY to maybe talk about what they're
20 doing on their end, how we can be helpful, how we
21 cannot be, you know, duplicative in anyway. We
22 certainly don't want to do what's already being done
23 and having to pay for it is--is the--even worse than
24 that. But I think that there is so much more work to
25 do, but it's nice to know that we have some really

2 terrific partners in the advocacy field starting with
3 member of the VAB, and again I just want to thank you
4 for producing this report. I want to thank for your
5 service. As always I know you don't get paid to be
6 here. You don't get paid to be on the VAB. You're
7 probably up very late a night going back and forth
8 with the report and the—the wording, but this is
9 very, very important work, and on your program
10 evaluation I think the VAB if you have—you're
11 training, working in—in the finance industry, I think
12 if there's specific evaluation methods that you think
13 the city ought to be using, send an email to
14 Commissioner Sutton. Perhaps the Administration can
15 put them in the Mayor's Management Report and make
16 that part of an annual way of analyzing how well the
17 agency is doing. I mean that's certainly something
18 that they'll be putting together this year as well.
19 So there are various mechanisms for evaluation,
20 oversight, and this is where you can really play an
21 important role. So thank you again. Any thoughts,
22 Council Member Vallone.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I just wanted to
24 wrap up. You know, one of the very first bills that
25 I passed into law with Chair Ulrich's help was

2 hearing the same plight from those who sat in your
3 chair saying we don't get the data from interagency
4 information on how many veterans are city—are public.
5 So there's so many different agencies. There are so
6 many different services, and every time I'd ask that
7 question say well, that's a different agency. Well,
8 that's a different agency. So I said the heck with
9 this, let's just create a wall that says you must
10 provide, you the City, data to us on every agency
11 that's providing veteran services. So you have that
12 tool as a law now in your arsenal to use. So feel
13 free. We'll get you that information. So now they
14 can't just sit back and say, well, you know, that's
15 another agency to that. You have to get that
16 information. So if we can't effect change, we won't
17 know the amount of veterans that we're actually
18 servicing. That was the first step, and Commissioner
19 I apologize because this is early and the Aging
20 Committee at 1:00 o'clock, and Margaret Chin would
21 have had my head if I missed that one, too. So I had
22 to cover two. Thank you very much.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you and
24 the testimony for the Commissioner is also available
25 here. Todd, Chair Haskins, thank you again, and

2 members of the Veterans Advisory Board, a wonderful
3 report. We look forward to following up on several
4 of these items, and we'll be in touch. Thank you for
5 your testimony today.

6 TODD HASKINS: It's important for us.
7 Thank you all.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Chairman.
9 Thank you. Okay, we are going to hear from the first
10 panel. If anybody else wants to sign up to speak,
11 please see the sergeant-at-arms. We have Adrienne
12 Braimer from the New York City Veterans Alliance, and
13 Mr. Dan McSweeney from the United War Vets Council on
14 the first panel. Again, if there are other folks who
15 want to testify, please fill out one of these slips
16 with the sergeant-at-arms. [pause] We'll start with
17 the Veterans Alliance.

18 ADRIENNE BRAIMER: Okay. My name is
19 Adrienne Braimer, and I am a veteran of the United
20 States Air Force. I served as a photo journalist on
21 combat patrols in both Iraq and Afghanistan. I am
22 here today to testify on behalf of the New York City
23 Veterans Alliance, a member supported grassroots
24 policy advocacy and empowerment organization serving
25 veterans, service members and their families across

2 the New York City Metropolitan area. [coughs] We
3 appreciate the effort that went into latest end of
4 year report for the Veterans Advisory Board, but I am
5 here to discuss one particular recommendation that
6 has potential bearing on the work I have been doing
7 over the last year and a half, which is for the New
8 York City Department of Veterans Services to produce
9 its own online community calendar. We agree on the
10 concept that an online community calendar is needed,
11 which is why the New York City Veterans Alliance
12 created one in August 2015, and why I have diligently
13 maintained and expanded since October 2015. Because
14 our calendar has been so successful, we move it from
15 the Alliance website to its own domain at
16 ourveterans.nyc where we host not only an extensive
17 list of upcoming events for veterans and their
18 families across the five boroughs, Long Island, North
19 Jersey and Westchester. We've also added a bulletin
20 board of new and short-term opportunities for
21 veterans and their families that aren't currently
22 listed elsewhere online. We have posted almost 1,000
23 community events since its inception, and right now
24 our calendar lists—lists more than 50 upcoming events
25 for veterans and their families in the New York Metro

2 area. Ourveterans.nyc currently averages 3,000
3 unique visitors each month and our audience continues
4 to grow by the day. I have served as the
5 administrator for our community calendar for more
6 than 16 months, and I can tell you from first hand
7 experience that the work is painstaking. Dozens of
8 local veteran organizations, private individuals and
9 service providers email their event information,
10 services and opportunities to me every week, and in a
11 variety of digital formats. My work involves a lot
12 of coordination with these organizations, and careful
13 veteran-vetting of events to ensure that we are
14 posting the most correct and up-to-date information
15 available. We include events from every local
16 veteran organization that sends us information. It
17 takes time, attention to detail and sometimes many
18 interactions to ensure our calendar listing delivers
19 the quality of information our community has come to
20 expect from us. We post event not-not just in the
21 five boroughs, but also from across Long Island,
22 North Jersey, Westchester and even from more distant
23 areas within commuting distance in New York City. We
24 do this because we found that the demand for our
25 calendar spans across the entire metro area, and we

2 often turn away requests from organizations located
3 even further away. All events in our area are
4 welcome on our calendar from a back yard barbecue for
5 wounded veterans, or a small theater production by
6 veteran performers to the Veterans Day Parade and
7 even VAB meetings. We are a trusted source of
8 critical information for our community, and we also
9 hear from organizations and agencies that they use
10 our calendar regularly to not only see what's
11 happening, but also as a planning tool to de-conflict
12 their events from the other myriad events, which are
13 most vital during Fleet Week, Memorial Day and the
14 entire month of November. This is all a service we
15 provide at no cost to our users, and at no cost to
16 city taxpayers. Our online community calendar has
17 been a key project of the New York City Veterans
18 Alliance as part of our mission of connecting,
19 informing, advocating for, and empowering our
20 community. We are a start-up non-profit organization
21 and our funding has come from our more than 220 dues
22 paying members, and more than 200 additional
23 individual donors. A significant portion of our
24 organization's time and treasure have been put toward
25 building and developing our community calendar, and

2 we continue to actively solicit the input and
3 participation of our community partners and users as
4 we grow and develop this in partnership with our
5 city's best and brightest—best and brightest civic
6 tech innovators of—to the call where the Alliance is
7 based. Later this year we plan to make our
8 information—information transportable to other
9 websites using RSS speed, and to build in search
10 capabilities and other user friendly tools. To the
11 best of our knowledge, we are the only organization
12 in the country that provides this service to veterans
13 in any large metropolitan area. We hope the VA—VAB
14 members will take the time to use ourveterans.nyc as
15 our community already does. We have public—
16 publicized every VAB meeting that has occurred since
17 our calendar has existed, and we would be pleased to
18 include more information about these meetings as well
19 as any information relevant to veterans and their
20 families across the New York Metro area. Anyone can
21 submit events of information to us at
22 ourveterans@nycveteransalliance.org Our members and
23 donors have made a tremendous investment in what we
24 have already created, and that investment should not
25 be supplanted to duplicate something that already

2 exists, and that is more expansive than what a city
3 agency is chartered to provide. On behalf of the New
4 York City Veterans Alliance, I thank you for the
5 opportunity to testify today. Pending your
6 questions, this concludes my testimony.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. We'll
8 save the questions until the panel is completed and
9 we'll hear now from Mr. Mc Sweeney.

10 DAN MC SWEENEY: [coughs] Thank you very
11 much Councilman Ulrich and Councilman Vallone. It's
12 great to see you. Commissioner Sutton, nice to see
13 you as well. I think Todd Haskins has left, but I-I
14 want to acknowledge him and his great work as the
15 Chairman of the VAB. Thank you for the opportunity
16 to speak today on the 2016 VAB Annual Report. I will
17 keep my remarks very brief. From the outset, I'd
18 like to, as I said, congratulate Todd Haskins and his
19 ten fellow VAB members for the dedication and
20 professionalism they have demonstrated in
21 revitalizing this important body. Their annual
22 report goes a long way toward organizing and address
23 issues relevant to the veterans' community in New
24 York. The minutes of the VAB's 2016 meetings at the
25 back of the report clearly demonstrates the Board's

2 improvements in organizing its work, and in expanding
3 its relevance and its reach. Of particular note, are
4 the VAB's seven recommendations to the Mayor and City
5 Council and we heard these from Todd earlier. They
6 span a wide array of issues, and are based on
7 critical thinking on how municipal government can
8 meaningfully improve the lives of our city's veterans
9 and their families. I want to commend the New York
10 City Department of Veteran Services, Commissioner
11 Loree Sutton and her team for their coordination with
12 the VAB, and this also obviously applies to the City
13 Council and it's Veteran Affairs Committee. The VAB
14 is an important forum for discussing issues relevant
15 to our community, and well reflects our diverse
16 constituency, and should be viewed as an important
17 convener and coordinator the wide array of entities
18 and perspectives active in the local veterans
19 population. A solid and simple example of this is
20 the ongoing effort to include members of the VA's
21 Community Veterans Engagement Board into VAB
22 meetings. That will occur starting this month.
23 We're at a point where coordination and collaboration
24 will be the value add for us at large, not the
25 introduction of new structures. The VAB is an

2 effective way for this to occur, and the United War
3 Veterans Council, which follows similar principles in
4 the non-profit space is very glad and proud to
5 support this effort. Again, thank you for the
6 opportunity to speak, and congratulations to the VAB
7 for their yeoman's work on behalf to the New York
8 City veterans community.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Mr. McSweeney, thank
10 you. Well, thank you for your testimony, and I
11 enjoyed appearing on that radio program with you last
12 week. Anything we can do to raise awareness about
13 veterans issues in New York City I think is—is very
14 important. Council Member Vallone, do you have any
15 questions for the panel before I wrap it up?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Sure. Adrienne
17 and Dan, thank you very much. Adrienne thank you for
18 the service also. The yeoman's work on the calendar
19 I—no one—I guess we all know how hard to keep that up
20 would be. Any suggestions on how the city could just
21 incorporate what's already existing since the
22 Commissioner is here instead of duplicating like you
23 said. Is it—is it a realistic vision that we could
24 just duplicate what's already there instead of
25 creating all over again?

2 ADRIENNE BRAIMER: You can use—you can
3 use our links that directly link to it from you face
4 page and visit the sights. Everything is listed
5 there. We can—we can work out another way to do it.
6 We're—we're very open to sharing the information
7 because we're all part of one team and veterans.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay, and I
9 think that's what we're trying to achieve. So I—I
10 see the Commissioner shaking her head there in the
11 corner so I think we're all on the right page, and
12 thank you for keeping us all up to date on that and
13 the follow-ups. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. I have
15 just a couple of question from just trying to get
16 some feedback again about the VAB meetings. Have
17 either of you or the bulk of you attended any of the
18 VAB hearings in the past year in any of the boroughs?

19 ADRIENNE BRAIMER: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You have not. Okay.

21 DAN MCSWEENEY: I've been to I think all
22 of them.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You've been to all
24 of them and—and Mr. McSweeney, in—in your opinion
25 what was your impression of those meetings? How well

2 were they run? How many? Was the attendance a good
3 reflection of the borough? Were the topics discussed
4 engaging in any way? Just give me some feedback
5 here.

6 DAN MCSWEENEY: Sure [coughs]. So my
7 predecessor at the United War Veterans Council was
8 Vince McGowan who is the former chair. So I have to
9 be measured in my response there because he did a
10 great job. However, Todd Haskins and his team Sam
11 Innocent and Joe Bellow share the leadership there
12 have done an amazing job not only codifying and
13 organizing the way we speak about thins, but also
14 casting a wider net. So at the first meeting I went
15 to in 2016 it was very small. The turnout was not
16 there. The last one we had, which was at-at the DVS
17 classroom area was, as Todd said, about 50 people,
18 and you could see a nice mix of questions regarding
19 policy and general issues down to the very granular,
20 and so to get that level of engagement and that level
21 of-I don't want to say dependency, but looking to the
22 VAB as a source for value and answers, I think
23 indicates that we are doing what we are supposed to
24 do.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's great. I-I
3 should have asked Todd. I know he had to leave. Are
4 they livestreaming those meetings? I wondered.

5 DAN MCSWEENEY: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: They are. I know
7 that was a project they were working on.

8 DAN MCSWEENEY: I think it's the New York
9 Film Academy if I'm not mistaken.

10 FEMALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh, wonderful.
12 Terrific. Well, that's—that's so important
13 especially for disabled veterans and veterans who are
14 not able to attend the meetings in person that they
15 can tune on their Smart Phone or their tablet or at
16 home. I think that's really important in keeping the
17 veterans community informed, but also keeping them
18 connected in a way I think also fosters a sense of,
19 you know, family, and wants to do those. So, but I
20 know that you are really praising Todd because the
21 two of you are Marines. So that's the—you're a
22 little biased in your opinion.

23 DAN MCSWEENEY: Well, it may go without
24 saying, but he's done a great job.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: He's done a
3 phenomenal job. I'm only teasing you, of course,
4 but--

5 DAN MCSWEENEY: Yeah, yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --the VAB is doing
7 some really impressive work, and we--we're looking
8 forward to another banner year, and they're helping
9 us tackle some very difficult issues sometimes that,
10 you know, we have to confront as--as a government and
11 as a society, and Adrienne I want to thank you, and I
12 know Kristen Rouse is not here today but please thank
13 her for her continued advocacy.

14 ADRIENNE BRAIMER: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's very important
16 and the work that New York City Veterans Alliance
17 does all year to keep veterans informed and keep them
18 connected about important issues not only in New York
19 but in Washington. I see a lot of national news that
20 I think is--is meaningful. We have a big year ahead
21 of us. There's no question about it, and the City
22 Council is looking forward to playing a very
23 important and formal role in the budget process, but
24 also beyond. There are a number of bills that other
25 colleagues of mine have sponsored, some resolutions,

2 some local laws that we'll be looking to the VAB and
3 the advocates to say tell us what you like about it.
4 Tell us what you don't like about it. You know,
5 should it be enacted into law or not? Should it be
6 passed or changed or, you know, we don't pretend to
7 have all the answers. That's why your participation
8 in these hearings is so important. So I want to
9 thank you both for being here today and, of course,
10 thank you for your service.

11 DAN MCSWEENEY: Thank you very much.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Alright, thank you
13 and that concludes today hearing. There are no more
14 people signed up to testify. So, we all get to go
15 home. Have a great day everybody. [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 February 13, 2017