

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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May 6, 2015  
Start: 1:21 p.m.  
Recess: 4:04 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Fernando Cabrera  
Andrew Cohen  
Alan N. Maisel  
Paul A. Vallone

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

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

Jason Hansman  
Iraq Vet and the Director  
External Program Relations  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

Oswaldo Pereira  
Veteran and Outreach Coordinator  
Office of the Public Advocate, Letitia James

Paul Schottenhamel  
Allied Veteran Committee of Ridgewood and Glendale  
American Legion

Kristen Rouse  
New York City Veterans Alliance

Scott Davidson  
President and CEO  
Vets GSA and Vets MS  
Founder of Veterans

Joe Bello  
New York City Metro Vets

Lee Covino  
Past Vice Chairman, NYC Veterans Advisory Board  
Past Veterans Advisor, SI Borough President's Office  
Current Treasurer, United Staten Island Veterans  
Organization, Inc.

Matthew Silverstein  
American Works

Craig Carolina  
American Works

Frank La Marsh  
American Legion

Dan McSweeney  
Income President  
War Veterans Council

Brett Morash  
Vice President  
Veterans Services for the Underserved

Christopher Cohane  
Disabled Veteran Vendors

Richard Rivera  
Disabled Veteran Vendors

Jennifer Rivera  
Director of Human Resources  
Veteran Affairs and sit  
Board of Suicide Prevention



2 [gavel]

3 SERGEANT-A-ARMS: [off mic] Quiet,  
4 please. Quiet Please.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon  
6 everyone. I'd ask if you have any cell phones or  
7 electronic devices that make loud noise to please  
8 turn them on silent or vibrate, and if anyone wants  
9 to testify today, please sign up with the Sergeant-  
10 At-Arms. In the back, there's a little slip. We'd  
11 like to get to as many panels and people as possible.  
12 I want to begin by recognizing the other members of  
13 this committee. We're joined by Council Member Cohen  
14 of the Bronx, Council Member Maisel of Brooklyn. I  
15 just saw Council Member Vallone. He's stepping at  
16 the Fire and Criminal Justice hearing. He said he's  
17 going to join us immediately after.

18 My name is Eric Ulrich. I'm the Chairman  
19 of the City Council Veterans Committee. New York  
20 City is home to more than 230,000 veterans, a  
21 population larger than that of 16 other states. Our  
22 veterans come from many different background, are  
23 well educated, possess enormous skill sets, and bring  
24 a strong sense of duty and work ethic to any effort  
25 they undertake. Veterans start businesses here.

2 They raise families here, and they contribute  
3 significantly to the local economy in New York City.  
4 On more than one occasion, Mayor Bill de Blasio has  
5 said that budgets are about values and the kind of  
6 city that we want to be. The budget for the Mayor's  
7 Office of Veterans Affairs or MOVA this year was  
8 roughly \$575,000. In the Mayor's Proposed Budget for  
9 Fiscal Year 2016, the Mayor is intending to spend  
10 approximately \$600,000 for MOVA, nearly half of which  
11 comes from the State. Historically, and this is a  
12 very important point, the city has under-funded MOVA.  
13 Not just in this administration, but in previous  
14 administration. The Council believes it currently  
15 lacks the staff and resources to adequately serve the  
16 needs of veterans to connect them to affordable  
17 housing, good paying jobs, comprehensive mental  
18 health services, and educational opportunities that  
19 are available to them. This is simply wrong. The  
20 fact that we only spend an average of a \$1.50 on each  
21 veteran living throughout the five boroughs is  
22 something we should not be proud of. The City  
23 Council firmly believes we can and must do better.

24 MOVA was created by Local Law--by Local  
25 Law in 1987. The initial proposal was for the office

1 to be established as an independent city agency, but  
2 when it was signed into law by then former Mayor Ed  
3 Koch it was placed within the Executive Office of the  
4 Mayor. In September 2004 after nine months of delay,  
5 Mayor de Blasio appointed retired Brigadier General  
6 Loree Sutton to lead MOVA in his administration. As  
7 I said at the time, and I still believe today, the  
8 Mayor could not have made a better choice or picked a  
9 better person to lead the Mayor's Office of Veteran's  
10 Affairs. Commissioner Sutton's record of service and  
11 commitment to helping veterans is indisputable, and  
12 she brings a positive and enthusiastic approach to  
13 her role as Commissioner of this office.

14 Unfortunately, the Council believes the Commissioner  
15 does not have the proper support from the  
16 Administration. There is perhaps no better example  
17 of the Administration's lack of commitment to  
18 providing assistance here than its refusal to  
19 continue fund benefits counselors in last year's  
20 budget.

21  
22 In 2013, the Robin Hood Foundation  
23 provided a \$250,000 grant to fund three benefits  
24 counselors, which helped address a significant  
25 backlog of claims at the local Veteran Administration

2 Hospitals. Unfortunately, when the grant expired in  
3 July of 2014, Mayor de Blasio decided not to include  
4 funding in the budget to keep these counselors.  
5 While the Administration is to be commended for  
6 attempts to end veteran homelessness as part of--as  
7 part of the Mayor's challenge to end veteran  
8 homelessness in the United States, the Council  
9 believes that this is simply not enough. And doesn't  
10 make up for the lack of dedicated resources and  
11 funding that veterans desperately deserve and need.

12           Today's hearing will focus on several  
13 important areas including the results of Commissioner  
14 Sutton's 90-day assessment period, her policy  
15 recommendations to the Mayor and the overall vision  
16 MOVA has in store for New York City's veterans and  
17 their families. We may also consider discuss--  
18 discussing Intro 314, which if passed would abolish  
19 MOVA and create an independent city agency dedicated  
20 to serving the needs of New York City's veterans.  
21 Ideally, as we've said in the past, such an agency  
22 would be fully funded, and would act as a one-stop  
23 shop to address any need that a veteran might have.

24           It's also worth mentioning that if we had  
25 a city agency, an independent city agency, the



2 responsibility to adequately fund that agency in the  
3 future would be equally shared by the Council. The  
4 Council is committed to working with the  
5 Administration to make New York City the American  
6 city where veterans want to live, where they want to  
7 work, start a business, build their futures and raise  
8 a family. However, we don't believe that this will  
9 be possible unless we have a robust, fully funded  
10 service Veterans Department that indicates the  
11 service members and veterans across the country that  
12 New York City is truly a veteran friendly city.

13 We look forward to hearing today's  
14 testimony from the Administration, from advocates  
15 representing various veterans service organization,  
16 and members of the public who wish to testify. We  
17 thank you for your patience, and first we're going to  
18 hear from Commissioner Sutton representing the  
19 Administration. Thank you for being here.

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Good afternoon.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: [interposing] Oh,  
22 whoops. Sorry, Commissioner, I need to swear you in.  
23 This is Committee Counsel Eric Bernstein. Do you  
24 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
25 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this

2 committee, and to respond honestly to council member  
3 questions?

4           COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I do. Thank you.  
5 Good afternoon, Chairman Ulrich and the members of  
6 the Committee on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton,  
7 and I remain honored as always to serve as the  
8 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veteran's  
9 Affairs. Thank you for this opportunity to meet with  
10 you and address today's topic of evaluating the  
11 effectiveness of MOVA and its role in serving New  
12 York City veterans. Mr. Chairman, during the nearly  
13 nine months since August 18, 2014 when you and I met  
14 at City Hall as Mayor de Blasio appointed me as  
15 Commission of the Mayor's Office of Veteran's  
16 Affairs, we have kept our promise to collaborate and  
17 to do whatever it takes to improve the lives of New  
18 York City veterans and their families. In working  
19 together, we have shared the view that New York City  
20 is uniquely positioned to lead the nation in this  
21 endeavor. While much has been done, much work  
22 remains. While many veterans are thriving, many are  
23 also still struggling. Together, we face a pressing  
24 challenge to communicate, coordinate and connect  
25 veteran needs with care, services and resources

2 throughout the city agencies, as well as community  
3 based organizations and service providers within the  
4 five boroughs. Our vast city agency resources  
5 combined with robust community partnerships are the  
6 key elements required to effectively meet the needs  
7 and promote the strengths of our city's veterans.  
8 Further, we both endorse that there is always more we  
9 can do, and we must join our efforts to make things  
10 better. Veterans and their families deserve our  
11 best.

12                   Established in 8--in 1987, under Local  
13 Law 53, MOVA's mission is to improve the lives of New  
14 York City veterans and their families. Leveraging  
15 the resources of agencies across the city government,  
16 MOVA provides services and connects veterans, active  
17 duty military and their families to the vast New York  
18 City, State and federal programs, as well as public  
19 and private resources, which are available throughout  
20 the City of New York. There are over 225,000  
21 veterans who live in the New York City coupled with  
22 military and families and over 20,000 retired  
23 veterans bringing the population to over 500,000 who  
24 call New York home.

2           In addition to MOVA's role with respect  
3 to policy coordination, direct services, referrals  
4 and community engagement, we are co-located with a  
5 dozen veteran services organizations. Including the  
6 American Legion Veterans Are Still Warriors, the  
7 Marine Corps League, Montford Marines Association,  
8 United War Veterans Council, Catholic Veterans,  
9 Haitian-American Veterans, Rockasa and Big Apple  
10 Chapter, Jewish War Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of  
11 American, the VFW of the NYPD, and Southwestern Asia  
12 Veterans. Known as Veterans Hall, this collaborative  
13 sharing of office resources, workspace and meeting  
14 room facilities provides frequent interaction and  
15 fosters MOVA's ability to support these VSOs and the  
16 veterans they represent.

17           I commenced duties on September 1, 2014  
18 when Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed me as  
19 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veteran's  
20 Affairs. I completed my initial assessment of MOVA,  
21 local community needs, and government and not-for-  
22 profit services and resources available throughout  
23 the city in December of 2014. During the assessment,  
24 MOVA engaged and visited over 250 city offices and  
25 agencies, veteran service organizations, veteran

2 membership organizations, healthcare programs,  
3 educational institutions, and public-private  
4 organizations throughout the five boroughs.  
5 Throughout this intense period of focused engagement,  
6 the overwhelming feedback from service providers,  
7 veterans and their family members had to with a  
8 pervasive lack of knowledge of existing services  
9 rather than a lack of actual resources.

10           As organizational executives are learning  
11 from healthcare reform and other sectors of the  
12 economy, the first leadership priority is to make the  
13 best use of existing resources through coordination,  
14 partnership and collaboration. This initial phase of  
15 organizational development is essential to formulate  
16 a strategic plan based on actual strengths,  
17 weaknesses, gaps and opportunities. Mission and  
18 strategy must drive programs in budget.  
19 Operationalizing the Mayor's guidance, I'm intensely  
20 focused on building MOVA's organization foundation,  
21 and capacity to fully leverage its relationship with  
22 the Mayor and his administration, all levels of  
23 government, and the vibrant public, private and not-  
24 for-profit sectors throughout New York City.

1                   This remains a work in progress as we  
2  
3                   engage our partners in support of MOVA's key  
4                   strategic initiatives to end veteran homelessness,  
5                   incorporate veterans and families within the First  
6                   Lady's Mental Health Roadmap strategy, and connect  
7                   veterans with city, career, business, and employment  
8                   opportunities. Committed to actualizing MOVA's full  
9                   potential, we are relentlessly moving forward to  
10                  realize this urgent goal. Mayor de Blasio's vision  
11                  informed by my assessment resulted in new strategic  
12                  priorities. The top tier includes ending veteran  
13                  homelessness. During his State of the City Address  
14                  in January, Mayor de Blasio issued a historic pledge  
15                  to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. The  
16                  City has placed over 200 veterans in homes so far  
17                  this year and 873 veterans were housed last year.  
18                  Veterans currently receive top placement priority for  
19                  all city housing programs. The City has identified  
20                  the best available housing options for approximately  
21                  850 of the veterans in shelter, which comprises 93%  
22                  of the current list of veterans awaiting permanent  
23                  housing.

24                         In November 2014, MOVA was elected to  
25                         serve as a member of a Continuum of Care Veterans

2 Task Force, a public-private interagency working  
3 group, which is co-chaired by the VA and HPD.  
4 Members also include additional city agencies, such  
5 as HRA, DHS and NYCHA, and the seven New York City  
6 not-for-profit service providers who currently  
7 receive supportive services for Veterans Family Grant  
8 Funding. The purpose of the Task Force, established  
9 in October of 2013, is to provide a leadership role  
10 in the prevention and eradication of homelessness in  
11 New York City. A broad based coalition of homeless  
12 housing and shelter providers, consumers, advocates  
13 and government representatives, the task force works  
14 together to shape citywide planning and decision  
15 making consistent with best national--national  
16 practices. These best practices include:

17                   Maintaining a relentless focus on  
18 removing barriers to permanent housing;

19                   Prioritizing chronically homeless  
20 veterans with HUD-supportive housing options;

21                   Coordinating outreach efforts to locate  
22 identify and engage homeless veterans;

23                   Targeting rapid re-housing interventions  
24 such as the VA Supportive Services for Veterans'  
25 Families, SSVF Program;

Leveraging local housing and services for VA ineligible veterans;

Increasing early detection access to preventive services to keep vulnerable veterans and their families house; and

Closely monitoring progress towards the goal of ending veteran homelessness; sustaining gains and applying lessons learned with veterans to the larger homeless population.

Promoting veteran and family mental health. MOVA wasted no time in seizing the opportunity to partner with Chirlane McCray, the First Lady of New York City, and incorporate veterans and their families in her Mental Health Roadmap, which will be released in the fall of 2015. To this end, MOVA hosted a recent two-day sampler tour of holistic programs supporting veterans and their families in New York City including the Fountain House Veterans Roundtable, which included 13 organizations represented. These include the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Mission Continues, Exit 12, Story Corps, the Head Strong Project, Outside The Wire and Team Red, White and Blue.



2                   We also visited with the Trauma and  
3 Resiliency Resources Program, which features  
4 integrative retreats with Yoga and eye movement  
5 desensitization and reprocessing, and equine  
6 training. As well, we went to the VA hospitals here  
7 in Manhattan and reviewed their animal therapy, and  
8 music therapy programs, as well as toured the--the  
9 veteran artist programs at the Brooklyn VA. The  
10 First Lady ended this two-day tour with a military  
11 spouse roundtable at Fort Hamilton where she was able  
12 to get a first-hand understanding of some of the  
13 stresses of being a military spouse.

14                   MOVA is pleased to partner with the First  
15 Lady's team, the Department of Health and Mental  
16 Health, and other city agencies to facilitate  
17 cultural transformation and implementation of a  
18 public health approach empowering individuals and  
19 championing community based services that enhance  
20 social support, dignity and independence. MOVA will  
21 also assume a vital coordination role to ensure that  
22 New York City veterans and their families are  
23 connected to quality public, private and social  
24 profit services.

## 2 Launching the City Recruitment

3 Initiative. MOVA will soon begin assisting agencies  
4 to adopt best practices and recruiting veterans for  
5 city career opportunities. Efforts will include  
6 posting city job openings where veterans and their  
7 families can readily access them. Working with human  
8 resources professionals to learn how to read military  
9 resume and interview veteran candidates. And  
10 adopting standard intake questions to help veterans  
11 and their family members self-identify when applying  
12 for city career and other opportunities.

13 MOVA gets going in 2014. First let me  
14 just briefly describe our day-to-day constituent  
15 services. In addition to the work performed by  
16 agency liaisons throughout city government, MOVA has  
17 assisted over 750 veteran constituents in person,  
18 through email, and by phone since September 1, 2014.  
19 Our outreach has included over 10,000 individuals who  
20 received information about MOVA and City of New York  
21 services including VA benefits; public benefits;  
22 veteran burial assistance; indigent burial  
23 assistance; discharge displacement and upgrade;  
24 education assistance; employment resources and  
25 referrals; eviction assistance; homelessness and

2 temporary housing assistance; housing resource  
3 assistance; military orders verification; senior  
4 protective services assistance; veteran treatment  
5 courts; mentor assistance; and utility arrears  
6 assistance to name a few.

7           Lunch Listen and Learn. MOVA hosted  
8 several working sessions to engage community  
9 advocates, service providers, and veterans service  
10 organizations in addressing a number of topics of  
11 relevant concern to veterans and their families.  
12 Given the popular response, MOVA plans to continue  
13 this program on month--bi-monthly basis starting in  
14 June 2015.

15           Community Program Visits. These visits  
16 informed MOVA's strategic priorities and  
17 recommendations through face-to-face meetings with  
18 veterans and veteran service organizations who are  
19 serving the city's veterans and their families. Such  
20 as Veteran Treatment Courts in Brooklyn and the Bronx  
21 Samaritan Village, Fountain House, VA Medical  
22 Treatment Centers, and the Veterans Affairs Benefits  
23 Administration, Vet Centers, Iraq and Afghanistan  
24 Veterans of America, the Mission Continues, U.S.  
25 Garrison, Fort Hamilton, the VFW, American Legion,

2 Bob Woodruff Foundation, the Intrepid Museum, Robin  
3 Hood Foundation, Joining Forces Philanthropy  
4 Roundtable, Catholic Charities, and Veterans On Wall  
5 Street. Again, to name a few.

6           MOVA also toured the homeless shelter  
7 intake process and met with service providers and  
8 federal and state officials. MOVA had unprecedented  
9 access to engaging substantively with senior  
10 officials including the VA Cabinet Secretary, Deputy  
11 Secretary for the VA, Under Secretary for Benefits,  
12 the Department of Labor, Director of Employment, VA  
13 Medical Center and Vet Center leadership; Fort  
14 Hamilton Command Team, Civilian Aid to the Secretary  
15 of the Army, United States Interagency Council on  
16 Homelessness, and Army for Life, Marine for Life and  
17 Fleet Week Leadership. These strategic working  
18 relationships have MOVA--raised MOVA's profile  
19 locally and nationally. Thereby, enhancing our  
20 ability to improve the lives of New York City  
21 veterans and their families.

22           MOVA Engagement. MOVA has forged a new  
23 working relationship with the--with CUNY and--and its  
24 New York City academic system encompassing 25  
25 colleges throughout the five boroughs. Catalyzed by

2 the MOVA Commissioners John Jay College keynote  
3 address at the June 2014 Women Veterans Empowerment  
4 Symposium, this collaborative partnership with CUNY  
5 has continued to broaden and deepen. Recent  
6 activities include MOVA consultation with the CUNY--  
7 COONY--MOVA's consultation with the CUNY Chancellor,  
8 John Jay College President, and CUNY senior academic  
9 leadership. Additional MOVA speaking engagements at  
10 CUNY student events, and MOVA participation in the  
11 John Jay College Corporate Roundtable on veterans  
12 issues. MOVA is also pleased to welcome Samuel  
13 Innocent as a new member of the New York City Veteran  
14 Advisory Board. Appointed by Mayor de Blasio in  
15 April of 2015, Mr. Innocent, a combat veteran, serves  
16 as the CUNY staff assistant for Veteran Affairs and  
17 Urban Initiatives, and is a member of the New York  
18 City Veterans Alliance. MOVA celebrates this  
19 collaboration, and looks forward to next steps on  
20 behalf of New York City student veterans within the  
21 CUNY system and beyond.

22 City Council Hearings. MOVA participated  
23 in eight hearings, three in 2014, frequently engaging  
24 with community advocates to better understanding  
25 their concerns. Hearing topics included: The

2 Proposed Establishment of a Department of Veterans  
3 Affairs; The Veterans Advisory Board; Ending Veteran  
4 Homelessness and Hunger; Supporting Veteran Owned  
5 Businesses; and Promoting Veteran Entrepreneurship;  
6 Strengthening the Transparency of the VAB and the  
7 Various Services Provided to Veterans by City  
8 Agencies; Evaluating the City's Veteran Treatment  
9 Courts; Veteran Liaisons at City Agencies; and  
10 today's topic, Evaluating the Effectiveness of MOVA's  
11 Role Serving New York City Veterans.

12 City Agencies. MOVA met with over 30  
13 city commissioners to discuss collaborative  
14 opportunities. Agency visits includes SBS, DHS, HRA,  
15 HPD, DCA, DFTA, NYCHA, FDNY, NYPD, Department of  
16 Corrections, the Mayor's Office of Contract Services,  
17 Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Mayor's Office of  
18 Persons with Disabilities, and Mayor's Office for  
19 Combating Domestic Violence. Visits also included  
20 the Public Advocate's Office, the office of all  
21 borough presidents, and the chambers of commerce.

22 IDNYC. Mayor de Blasio commits to the  
23 addition of a veteran designator to the hugely  
24 popular IDNYC Municipal Identification cards, which  
25 features numerous benefits in cultural attractions.

2 The Veteran Designator Action was initiated in 2014.  
3 The launch is planned for this year, 2015.

4           The Department of Consumer Affairs.  
5 Commission Sutton and MOVA co-authored a letter with  
6 Commissioner Menin of DCA to acknowledge federal  
7 actions underscore New York City commitment to  
8 thwarting financial predatory actions and advocate  
9 for increased safeguards. MOVA is continuing its  
10 collaboration with DCA advocating for stronger  
11 regulatory enforcement in prosecution of recent  
12 abuses exposed within the financial loan industry  
13 that have targeted veterans and their families. Our  
14 combined advocacy joining efforts at the state and  
15 federal level is intended to assist in protecting  
16 veterans from unscrupulous individuals bent on  
17 exploitation.

18           Community Events and Ceremonial Support.  
19 MOVA's participation has included Veterans Day  
20 Parade, CUNY veteran academic awards, Salute to Women  
21 Who Serve, the Department of Labor Veteran  
22 Information Forum, Military Retiree Appreciation Day,  
23 the Air Force Birthday, Korean War Veterans, Veterans  
24 Day Salute, the presentation of Insignia to the  
25 Legion of Honor to honor American World War II

2 veterans, United War Veterans Council Events, Spar--  
3 Star Spangled Banner Reception, IAVA Annual Gala,  
4 Knights of Pythias, Welcome Home Vietnam, Salute to  
5 Women Who Served, Volunteers of America, Safe Haven,  
6 Veterans Day Event, Theater of War, Armed in the Arts  
7 and the Armed Forces. To, again, name but a few.

8           MOVA Appointments to City Task Forces.  
9 Behavioral Health Task Force on the Criminal Justice  
10 System. MOVA's role is to ensure that the Mayor's  
11 Office of Criminal Justice and the Department of  
12 Corrections strategy incorporates a veteran informed  
13 perspective, as well as emerging neuroscience  
14 findings. Working meetings to date have focused on  
15 standardizing intake questions to identify veterans  
16 and their family members as well as to ensure  
17 appropriate behavioral health services at all points  
18 in the system. These new questions will spearhead  
19 our efforts across city agencies to identify veterans  
20 and their families so that we can better meet--meet  
21 their needs.

22           Small Business Services, MOCS and MOVA  
23 Veterans Business Report and Task Force. MOVA  
24 partnered with SBS in co-hosting four follow-up  
25 feedback sessions, and participating in a quarterly



2 citywide veteran business entrepreneur event. MOVA  
3 is establishing a veteran business owner task force  
4 in addition to its existing Committee on Women  
5 Veterans, both of which will report findings and  
6 recommendations to the VAB. MOVA is also partnering  
7 with SBS to notify veteran business owners to  
8 register their business in the new PIP, the Partner  
9 Information, the Payee Information Portal, which is  
10 now up and running. We will further our work with  
11 SBS with the Mayor's Office of Contract Services and  
12 other partners to fulfill the actions and  
13 recommendations aimed at building increased capacity  
14 for assisting veteran business owners in a variety of  
15 domains: Networking, mentoring, training,  
16 engagement, outreach and leadership to start and grow  
17 their own businesses as well as to pursue other  
18 career employment opportunities.

19 MOVA On the Move in 2015. Completed  
20 Legislation: Maybe de Blasio signed three veteran  
21 bills into law reforming the VAB and establishing  
22 agency reporting for select services sought by  
23 veterans.

24 Veteran Advisory Board Appointments.  
25 Mayor de Blasio appointed six highly qualified new

2 VAB members to fill expired membership terms. The  
3 Speaker appointed one new member and renewed terms  
4 for two previous members. Two additional speaker  
5 appointments are pending in June 2015. Four of the  
6 new VAB members have served in Iraq or Afghanistan,  
7 and reflect diversity and depth with respect to  
8 branch and era of service, professional expertise and  
9 veteran community advocacy activities.

10           Respect for the following: MOVA  
11 collaborated on updating the city's flag lowering  
12 protocol to assure appropriate respect and honor for  
13 our fallen comrades.

14           Agency Veteran Liaisons. As I testified  
15 before this committee a week ago, the Veteran  
16 liaisons at city agencies are integral resources for  
17 MOVA, whose staff members draw upon liaison expertise  
18 and knowledge within their respective agencies across  
19 city government to support the needs of veterans and  
20 their family members on a regular basis. In  
21 reciprocal supportive role, MOVA is a trusted  
22 resource for city agency liaisons. MOVA's  
23 relationship with agency liaisons formed the bedrock  
24 foundation upon which MOVA with our expertise  
25 concerning veteran's specific needs and liaisons with

2 their expertise in agency-specific resources build  
3 alliances and keep each other informed of emerging  
4 developments.

5 To recap, agency veteran liaisons conduct  
6 three essential roles:

7 1. Supporting the veteran employees  
8 within their own agencies. Liaisons provide crucial  
9 assistance to secure benefits, service and support.

10 2. Supporting the non-city needs of  
11 veterans employed by their respective agency.

12 Veteran liaisons frequently consult with MOVA to  
13 determine the best course of action for a given  
14 challenge, and

15 3. Respond to MOVA queries regarding  
16 the needs of veteran constituents who are not city  
17 employees. Liaisons are readily available for  
18 consultation to assist MOVA staff with constituent  
19 issues. MOVA and the veteran liaisons are ideally  
20 suited for this teamwork role, given their combined  
21 extensive knowledge base concerning city agencies and  
22 local, state, and federal resources. As well as  
23 MOVA's longstanding relationships with veteran  
24 service organizations and others who serve the  
25 veterans community. MOVA is broadening and deepening

2 its relationship with city agency veteran liaisons  
3 whose role we regard and highly value as a strategic  
4 force multiplier. Accordingly, we are proactively  
5 engaging with the liaisons to identify current and  
6 emerging agency programs and resources that would be  
7 of interest to veterans and their families, as well  
8 as best practices for supporting existing city  
9 employees who are veterans and/or members of the  
10 reserves and the National Guard.

11           Having shared many of MOVA's activities  
12 and achievements since September of 2014, I will now  
13 close with a few enduring thoughts. The issues that  
14 veterans face during their transition to civilian  
15 life are extraordinarily complex and permeate every  
16 aspect of their journey home. From securing  
17 employment to finding a home to accessing health  
18 services to simply reuniting with family and friends  
19 with the health, confidence and security they  
20 deserve. To rededicating themselves to continued  
21 service on behalf of others. As greater numbers of  
22 our men and women in uniform turn--return home, their  
23 long-term health and wellbeing is our responsibility  
24 as a community to safeguard and ensure this is not  
25 charity. It's our national duty.

2 Under Mayor de Blasio's leadership, MOVA  
3 will continue to fully engage in collaboration with  
4 city agencies as well as partnerships with civic,  
5 social profit, corporate, academic and philanthropic  
6 organizations dedicated to serving veterans.  
7 Including the chambers of commerce in all five  
8 boroughs, and the VA New York Harbor Healthcare  
9 System. These linkages extend beyond New York City  
10 to include the New York State Division of Veterans  
11 Affairs as well as the U.S. Department of Veterans  
12 Affairs. The VA system cannot do it all. Together,  
13 we must work as a team. As your MOVA Commissioner  
14 for Veterans Affairs, I will continue to directly  
15 engage with all of the boroughs, all generations of  
16 veterans, all components, active Reserve and National  
17 Guard members. All services, veterans and their  
18 family members. As well, as engaging the commitment  
19 and creativity of civic leaders, advocates and  
20 stakeholders in all sectors. Concurrently, I am  
21 joining forces with my fellow commissioners and other  
22 key members of this administration to identify  
23 potential synergies as virtually every policy issue  
24 facing New York City is relevant for veterans and  
25 their loved ones.

2           A multi-pronged strategy is critical to  
3 the way ahead. Having led and changed complex  
4 organizations over the past three decades, I'm also  
5 drawing upon and broadening my network to maximize  
6 MOVA's capacity for collaboration, stewardship,  
7 creativity, partnership, and coordination. It is  
8 indeed exciting to imagine the possibilities that lie  
9 within our grasp. Working together, let's keep after  
10 it. To this end I thank you for your continued  
11 leadership, passion, energy and enthusiasm. At this  
12 time, I welcome your thoughts, questions and  
13 concerns.

14           CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you.  
15 Commissioner Sutton, as always you are a welcomed  
16 presence before this committee. You've been here  
17 many times and I--I said at the last hearing and it  
18 should be said again today. There was a time when we  
19 didn't even have an oversight hear over MOVA. I  
20 think it went three years where we didn't have an  
21 oversight hearing. So, the fact that this is your  
22 second one in less than a year I think you're off to  
23 a great start. And, you've been to many, even the  
24 ones you didn't have to be at. So, no one is  
25 questioning your energy, your level of commitment,

2 and if I had to rate the job you're doing, I'd say  
3 you're doing an A+ job. I think you're doing a  
4 phenomenal job. There are some of the members who  
5 have other hearings. So to be courteous to them,  
6 I'll save my questions until afterwards. If they  
7 have any questions first in case they have to check  
8 in and check out? You're going to stay, right.  
9 Okay.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [off mic]

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. So, Council  
12 Member Cabrera from the Bronx.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you, Mr.  
14 Chair. Commissioner, welcome and again  
15 congratulations on you A+. I have a question  
16 regarding--I know the Administration had pledged to  
17 end veteran homelessness in the city by the end of  
18 2015. Can you tell us how we're doing with that?

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. As I had  
20 mentioned in my testimony, last year we were able to  
21 place over 800, 873 veterans. This year over 200  
22 thus far. New York City received an award. Two  
23 cities in the country last November who were awarded  
24 with having made the most impact in reducing veteran  
25 homelessness. And so, we are now continuing our

2 efforts down the home stretch. The task force that I  
3 mentioned to you that's co-chaired by the VA, by HPD  
4 and has all of the SSVF grantees, as well as members  
5 of the organ--of the city agencies. It's continuing  
6 to work this hard. We've got regular meetings in  
7 City Hall. This demands weekly attention by the  
8 senior most members of this administration to include  
9 the Mayor. We are also engaging with landlords and  
10 with real estate developers here in New York City.  
11 We are reaching out to folks who have been inspired  
12 by the Mayor's pledge at his State of the City  
13 Address who want to be part of this movement.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But do you think  
15 that we will reach that goal by the end of the year?

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, I do.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And so we are on  
18 track--

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --you believe?

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, yes, we will.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay, beautiful,  
25 beautiful. The other question that I know there's a



2 lot of interest in this committee is that right now  
3 you're not a department right? You--so, what are  
4 your feelings towards that? Do you feel that you  
5 could be more effective, the interactions with the  
6 Council being more effective in terms of allocated  
7 funding, making it a lot easier for organizations  
8 that are represented here today? Do you think that  
9 it will make sense to do such a--to have it as a  
10 department rather than just--right now as it's  
11 standing, Mr. Chairman, what do we have right now?  
12 It's just an office?

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We have an office.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Just an as  
15 office.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: The Mayor's Office  
17 of Veterans Affairs, that is correct.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So do you think  
19 that you will be more effective if you were a  
20 department?

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Council Member  
22 Cabrera, I will keep that as an open question going  
23 forward. My pledge to the Mayor and to the taxpayers  
24 ad to the veterans their families of New York is to  
25 make the best use of the resources we currently have.

2 We are in the midst of doing that right now. Once I  
3 have convinced myself that we have maximized the  
4 resources that we current have--currently have, then  
5 we'll be in a position to assess what might make  
6 sense going down the road.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But, do you  
8 think--So, let me see if I understand it right.  
9 You're saying that--that with the resources that you  
10 have--that have been given to you--right now the  
11 budget for this year, what are you looking at?

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: This is a great--  
13 this is a great point, Council Member Cabrera because  
14 you're right. If you just look at the MOVA budget in  
15 particular it covers the salaries largely of the  
16 folks who do the work--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]  
18 Right.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --within the core  
20 office. But for example, if you look across city  
21 government. For example Small Business Services, the  
22 Workforce 1 programs that they have stood up for  
23 small business owners. Veterans who want to become  
24 entrepreneurs, those who want to get mentoring or  
25 networking skills, learn how to contract with city

2 government, state and federal government, that budget  
3 is almost a million dollars. You go across every  
4 single agency across the city. This is nearly an \$80  
5 billion a year enterprise--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]

7 Right.

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --Council Member  
9 Cabrera. So to say that this Mayor does not care  
10 about veterans and their families because you're  
11 point to MOVA's budget is simply, simply wrong.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But  
13 Commissioner, I haven't said that. [laughs] I  
14 didn't say that. I was--I was just asking a simple  
15 question. Maybe you were anticipating for me to say  
16 that.

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, actually--I  
18 was actually referring to Chairman--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]

20 Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --Ulrich's words.  
22 So you--you were--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]

24 Okay, you can--you can talk to him about that.

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --you were a  
3 threat, okay.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But that's not,  
5 you know, I--I don't think I alluded that even to  
6 being my premise. I'm just looking for a level of  
7 effectiveness, for example for mental health. You  
8 know, I come from the mental health--

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
10 Absolutely.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --field. That  
12 for a veteran--this is what goes through my head, and  
13 if I could just put it plainly, if I was a veteran  
14 and I've got okay, MOVA and then the culture is that,  
15 you know, you go to MOVA. You go to MOVA for  
16 everything rather than I'm going to be--referred some  
17 place else. And I get it. I can see how the  
18 collaboration with other agencies saying we want do  
19 that. Especially agencies that are very, very  
20 effective. But, for example mental health, I mean I  
21 think it will make sense to--to be able to have  
22 direct access, and--and to get a reputation, a  
23 greater reputation that if you need mental health  
24 services you go straight to MOVA and the counselors  
25 are going to be there. That's just a--just a case

2 study kind of example that I'm giving. But that,  
3 just--just is that in your framework?

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We're not primarily  
5 a direct service provider. That is correct. During  
6 my assessment when I visited, as a I mentioned a  
7 number of organizations, including our VA facilities,  
8 including service providers and community based  
9 organizations throughout New York City, access was a  
10 problem only in so far as--as it involved ignorance.  
11 People who didn't know that services existed. In  
12 fact, just a couple of weeks ago in the VA system  
13 along there were access statistics that were  
14 published. And it turns out that in--that in New  
15 York City less than one percent of the veterans who  
16 were seen with the VA system, the eight major  
17 facilities here in New York City had to wait more  
18 than 30 days. Access is not the issue. The NYC  
19 Serves program, they're in their fifth month now  
20 talking with their case managers who work with the 40  
21 organizations across that network. They're thrilled.  
22 They're getting new veterans who are coming into the  
23 system. They're got capacity. So I'm not going to--  
24 I'm not going to duplicate that at MOVA. I'm going  
25 to absolutely work to maximize our capacity to serve

2 as that trusted hub where we can be an advocate. We  
3 can educate. We can inform. We can connect. We can  
4 partner, and together we can do so much more with  
5 that synergy here in the best--best city in the  
6 world. So that's--that's my privilege. And to work  
7 with folks like you on this Council and to work with  
8 the advocates that we have across this great city, it  
9 just doesn't get any better than this, Council Member  
10 Cabrera.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So let me--I'll  
12 close with this, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for the  
13 opportunity to ask this last question is that do you  
14 see--do you see anything lacking in the system that  
15 could be better served through MOVA?

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, and so let  
17 me--let me circle back because you had mentioned  
18 mental health services and it-- Actually, we have  
19 identified an area in the system that could use some  
20 additional development. That's why we partnered in  
21 our partnering with the First Lady to incorporate  
22 veterans and their families' needs within the Mental  
23 Health Roadmap strategy. That will--that's a work in  
24 progress right now. The final strategy will be  
25 released this fall, but we see that particularly in

2 the community itself that to be able to augment what  
3 the conventional community organizations, the  
4 government, whether it be the VA or other  
5 organizations are currently providing. We know that  
6 there is a population of veterans and their family  
7 members who they're not sick, they're not well, but  
8 they're not right either. Their mind-body systems  
9 have been deregulated by over 13 years of war, and  
10 they've lost the capacity in many cases to have safe  
11 and trusting relationships that--that are no longer  
12 dependent upon the survival bonds of combat. And so  
13 the good news is and, and our research is showing us  
14 that to be able to engage in things like integrative  
15 retreats where three or four days you come together  
16 with families with the community. You learn skills-

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing] I  
18 like that.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --you do things  
20 that can help you feel normal again that can reset  
21 your mind-body system. Gary Trudeau in New York City  
22 funding an app that--that features these self-  
23 regulation skills that--that help rebalance, the  
24 helps veterans and their families restore the  
25 capacity for safe and trusting relationships. So

2 those activities would include not only integrative  
3 retreats, but things like acupuncture, like yoga,  
4 like equine therapy. We've got Valor here today,  
5 service dog therapy. We've got--thanks so much  
6 Jerry. We've got all kinds of ways, a holistic range  
7 of options that ought to be the first line of  
8 intervention for hope and healing. And so that's  
9 really a gap within the system right now, and I am  
10 absolutely committed in this role in this city at  
11 this time for our veterans and their families to  
12 extend the front line of intervention from the clinic  
13 and the hospital. As important as those services  
14 are, to extend that to the front lines of community  
15 where veterans and their families are living,  
16 growing, working, studying and really could use some  
17 additional support.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you,  
19 Commissioner. I'm going to close with this question,  
20 and turn it back to the Chair because he just--we're  
21 planning and seeing ahead in terms of asking this  
22 question. What are--what are the advocates sharing  
23 with you that you--in terms of ideas, framework  
24 systems, structures that at the moment you're



2 strongly considering and implementing? And with that  
3 I'll turn it back to the Chair.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Let me make sure I  
5 understand the question. What are they sharing with  
6 me with respect to--?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: In respect to  
8 MOVA's role in terms of better servicing the veterans  
9 what are some of the ideas, concepts--

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Sure.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --best  
12 practices.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah, thank you  
14 very much, Council Member Cabrera. You know, one of  
15 the things that is a concern and it's certainly one  
16 that I share and that is having access across the  
17 five boroughs. That's been an issue, a concern. So,  
18 for example, two weeks ago I had a chance to sit down  
19 with Chapter 32 of the Vietnam Veterans of America.  
20 They had their meeting in Queens, and sat down and  
21 really brainstormed how Queens for example is the  
22 borough that has the largest number of veterans. You  
23 know, to learn about the struggles that many of them  
24 are having with access even with the counselors and  
25 the services that are available with Queens. So, you

2 know, last week I met with folks from the State  
3 Division of Veterans Affairs to look at what they've  
4 got. You know, you go up on their website, and you  
5 put your zip code in or you put in the borough, you--  
6 you can--you can get services that are available  
7 across the five boroughs. The American Legion has a  
8 number of benefits counselors. We know that VFW next  
9 week actually will be meeting with some folks from  
10 DAV. We're going to be reaching out the VSOs because  
11 we know that this is not--this is not a concern that  
12 has a simple answer. And so, it's going to require  
13 really the efforts of all of us to get the word out  
14 to veterans and their family members. You know, if  
15 they have a disability of they need to file a claim.  
16 They need to connect with city services, with public  
17 benefits. Whatever the case may be. So this  
18 something that we are actively--actively working on  
19 right now. And I share the concerns of advocates and  
20 others who have struggled--struggled with access.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
22 much. Thank you for the extra time.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Council Member  
24 Cabrera and Commissioner, before we move on, I want  
25 to put in a plug. Unfortunately, he left, Council

2 Member Maisel informed the members of this committee  
3 that he was able to get an assembly sponsor for the  
4 bill that we're passing the Reso on, which would  
5 require SUNY and CUNY to award college credits to  
6 veterans in New York State. So at the time of the  
7 hearing when the members of the committee and I  
8 passed the resolution, which we'll be voting on next  
9 week, it only had a State Senate sponsor, and now  
10 it's going to be introduced in the Assembly. And I  
11 know that education and helping veterans with those  
12 issues are very important to Council Member Maisel.  
13 And I'm sorry that we couldn't bring that up sooner,  
14 but we're passing the Resolution 329 at the next  
15 Stated, and the Assembly is going to be receiving a  
16 bill. Council Member Vallone had some questions.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair  
18 Ulrich. Good afternoon, Commissioner, Doctor,  
19 General, all three.

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]  
21 Hello, Council Member Vallone.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And I agree that  
23 probably the best thing the Mayor has done on behalf  
24 of veterans is putting you in as the Commissioner.  
25 Our job is to--to fight for more. So as--as being

2 privileged to sit on this Committee for Veterans I  
3 will do nothing less. And hopefully my next three  
4 and hopefully seven more years to do that. So  
5 sometimes we can take the fight where we know you may  
6 be limited. So, one of the things that I think we  
7 should acknowledge right off the bat is I'm very  
8 happy to see our new members of the Veterans Board  
9 that were appointed. And I have to commend Chair  
10 Ulrich for putting together a meeting today where one  
11 of the first times you have members of the board meet  
12 with the Council, open and speaking freely about  
13 ideas, and open communication. And, I know you're a  
14 big proponent of that. So, that went over very well,  
15 and some of them are here as we speak. So, we don't  
16 know if they want to stand the members of the board,  
17 but it would be nice to be acknowledged.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Come on stand.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: There we go.

20 Come on. [applause] I know this is--

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] [off  
22 mic] The members of the VAB. [applause] Thanks so  
23 much for coming.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And Charlie is  
25 in the house, too, I see.

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And Mallard [sic].

3 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And Mallard.

4 So, I--I look at some of the things that the  
5 Administration is putting forward as initiatives, and  
6 I look at the funding for those things. And I still  
7 want to see the word veterans in those. You know,  
8 I'll bring to you what was released yesterday was a  
9 \$54 million influx into an inclusive mental health  
10 system in New York City, and trying to create a  
11 larger model. Some of the things that are in that  
12 proposal are community schools, homeless youth  
13 shelters, Rikers Island, family shelters, Health and  
14 Hospital Corp., relationship counseling, geriatric  
15 mental health, coordinated mental health planning,  
16 Nazi [sic] and veterans.

17 So, if I'm putting forth a \$54 million  
18 budget for an increase that's clearly out there, I  
19 could do nothing less than sit on this committee and  
20 say where are my veterans. So I heard some of the  
21 great. I know that you're in that formative stage  
22 where you are saying with that holistic ideas. I love  
23 all that. We love that, but I want it in here.

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And I--I push--

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] So  
3 I want that. I want that. [laughs]

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Because  
6 sometimes the boat comes and we've got to be on that  
7 boat because we don't know what's going to be in next  
8 year's budget. And when I see this go out, and--and  
9 I don't see my--my veterans in there, I've--I've got  
10 to fight for it. I've got to go against it and say,  
11 how can we have mental health and not have included  
12 it the budget.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes. Thank you,  
14 Council Member Vallone. I can promise you this:  
15 When the final strategy is published veterans will be  
16 in it. We are working with the First Lady and her  
17 team right now. This is an historic opportunity, and  
18 I thank you for bringing--bringing that forward.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: It is. It's the  
20 perfect timing.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So we will be  
23 there and I think Chair Ulrich, and one thing we  
24 have, we will not back down from a fight when it

25

2 comes our veterans. So we want to see that in the  
3 final budget.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you very  
5 much.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: It's perfect  
7 timing.

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And I--I know I  
10 missed the beginning of your testimony. I apologize.  
11 There were so many things going on today. There's  
12 another committee, but I--I was told that you  
13 mentioned that veterans ID is in the works.

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Could you just  
16 expand n that a little bit since I missed what--what  
17 the testimony was.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. No, we've  
19 very excited about this, and you're probably aware of  
20 the--the overwhelming popularity of the program that  
21 was launched in January, the IDNYC Card that in just  
22 the first few months have overtaken, you know, the  
23 six cities that already have this card. We've  
24 already exceeded that number. It's an amazing  
25 program. Well, from the inception starting last year

2 when I first came on board and I heard about this, I  
3 knew that we wanted to have a veterans designator.  
4 The Mayor signed off on that last year. We are now  
5 working with operations with IDNYC with their team to  
6 able to bring it on this year. So you will be  
7 hearing more from that, but we are very, very  
8 excited. We think that this is something where we  
9 can really, you know, partner with the work--with the  
10 great work that's already going around. For example,  
11 you know, when we went around to the chambers of  
12 commerce across the--the five boroughs-- You know a  
13 number of the boroughs right now whether it was State  
14 Island or Queens or the Bronx, I mean they've got  
15 great programs. You know, local businesses. I know  
16 Brooklyn's got some great ones. Every--every borough  
17 has got local businesses who want to recognize  
18 veterans. Well, this idea is going to give them the,  
19 you know, the confidence that, you know, this is  
20 actually a veteran. It won't have the Social  
21 Security on it. We are working now to bring that  
22 forward into--into fruiting and you're going hear--  
23 you're going to hear more about that very, very soon.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Maybe you could  
25 expand upon the success of the original card where



2 the benefits are creating the outline for those who  
3 presented whether it's for cultural institutions--

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]

5 Right.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --that we could  
7 make sure our veterans and whatever benefits they're  
8 entitled to, are immediately brought to the attention  
9 when that card is presented.

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Whether it's in  
12 a courthouse, additional legal services, whether it's  
13 for housing, whether it's for a job benefit. I think  
14 we should really utilize that ability of this card to  
15 bring forward those services.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That is absolutely  
17 the goal.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]  
19 The last point because I know Chair Ulrich is going  
20 to--to advocate for it. I think we are united on  
21 our front to keep the fight to make sure that MOVA  
22 becomes its own agency. And I appreciate your  
23 position that you're evaluating, and you're going to  
24 make sure the resource is properly allocated before  
25 we take the next step. But in my eyes, and I know

2 for the other members of the committee is going to  
3 say that also we want that agency committed--created.  
4 And I think we owe that to the veterans. And I think  
5 it would be a great way as the greatest city in the  
6 world to show that we have the greatest agency in the  
7 world with now a great Commissioner at its head at  
8 its head. So that we could properly allocate  
9 funding. So that we could have oversight together.  
10 So that we can make allocations from our Council  
11 budget. So that we can centralize services for our  
12 veterans. So that we can make it shine on its own,  
13 and not be part of the sub-sister of another agency.  
14 And I think that would be such a huge statement that  
15 we could make to take that agency out, and make it a  
16 full-- So we could all take in the creation of that.  
17 With your leadership and with Chair Ulrich at the  
18 helm here, I think it would be a great time to take  
19 that on. So we will--we will advocate for that, and--  
20 --and I know your position and it's difficult being  
21 where you're at. But today's hearing is just so you  
22 know, and I mean I'm going to turn it back to the  
23 Chair, that we are--we are 100% behind the creation  
24 of that, and we'd love to see that happen under your  
25 stewardship. So that's just my last point.

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Okay, thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'd like to thank  
4 you, Council Member Vallone for your questions. I  
5 know I mentioned that you saw the other members  
6 leave. There are several other committees that are  
7 meeting across the street and the room next door. So  
8 we don't want to be rude to them, and they have other  
9 duties that they needed to get to. And Vallone  
10 always stays. So thank you. He always stays until  
11 the end. I want to bring up first--I mentioned in  
12 the opening remarks, which I should clarify, too,  
13 that--regarding the benefits counselors that were not  
14 included in the budget. The budget was passed before  
15 Commissioner Sutton even assumed responsibilities of  
16 leading MOVA. The budget was passed on July 1st.  
17 Commissioner Sutton took over in September. So she  
18 actually came on two months after this. I don't want  
19 to misconstrue anyone to believe that she had  
20 anything to do with those three benefits counselors  
21 that were in MOVA that were funded under the Robin  
22 Hood Grant no longer being there. That wasn't--she  
23 has nothing to do with that. That was not her fault,  
24 but that is a sore point, and the question that I  
25 have is, has the Mayor, the Administration or any of

2 the folks at OMB taken a look at, you know, bringing  
3 three--those three benefits counselors back to MOVA  
4 or hiring additional benefits counselors to assist  
5 veterans that call MOVA with VA related claims.

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you, Mr.  
7 Chairman. This is an issue that I have researched  
8 and have learned more of the context behind that  
9 program bringing on those three counselors. As you  
10 will recall, there was a huge, huge issue just a  
11 couple of years ago with the backlog. Nationally,  
12 that backlog has gone from over 600,000 to now well  
13 under 200,000 claims. Here in New York City, in 2012  
14 at the very height of the backlog jam, we had 13--  
15 over 13,000--13,508 claims in that backlog. And so,  
16 these three counselors were brought on board. They  
17 were funded for a year by Robin Hood Foundation, and  
18 they really formed part of the team to chip away at  
19 that backlog. So, I'm very pleased to report that as  
20 of today we are down to 1,777, and when I say we,  
21 it's the broad we New York City talking to Sue Malley  
22 and her team at the Veteran Benefit Association or  
23 Administration regional office. So that is an 87%  
24 decrease in the backlog, which is really something to  
25 celebrate. But this is no time to rest on our

2 laurels. We also know that the issues of access, and  
3 the issues of veterans coming back out of uniform,  
4 returning to New York City. Some coming back home,  
5 some like me, you know, coming here for the first  
6 time to live that this is an issue that we'll  
7 continue to work very closely with the VA, with the  
8 State Division of Veterans Affairs as well as with  
9 our VSO partners. Frankly, when I looked at the--the  
10 work record of the three counselors--benefit  
11 counselors, they were great professionals, great  
12 folks. But it--it seemed clear to me that that was  
13 not an effective use of resources. So that's part of  
14 why, as I mentioned to Council Member Cabrera that  
15 I'm sitting down with VSOs with the VA with the  
16 state, and really borough by borough let's figure it  
17 out. There's not going to be a cookie cutter  
18 solution for this, but that is the background of  
19 those three benefit counselors. It was not intended  
20 to be an ongoing program, and indeed the backlog  
21 thankfully is much, much decreased.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank God for that.  
23 In New York we have an exceptional VA here. I've met  
24 with the Administrator Sue Malley. I was very  
25 impressed not only in Manhattan, but in the other

2 boroughs where the VA incentives exist. And we  
3 thankfully don't have the same issues and problems  
4 that they have in other states, and that's a good  
5 thing, and I think everybody can agree on that. What  
6 concerns me, and I'm sure you is that we are  
7 expecting approximately 20 or 30,000 additional  
8 veterans who are coming out of active duty that are  
9 going to transition back into civilian life. A lot  
10 of those individuals said they were from New York.  
11 They lived in New York. They might come back to New  
12 York to live in New York. We want them to. You  
13 know, what issues--they might have issues with the VA  
14 and that might increase the caseload. So what is the  
15 administration doing to prepare for the additional  
16 veterans, the future veterans, if you will, that are  
17 going to come back and need services and help with  
18 accessing those services?

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure. You've heard  
20 me say before that part of my strategy is to attract  
21 and engage returning veterans and their families to  
22 choose New York City as an ideal community in which  
23 they can come, and they can study, and they can study  
24 and they can grow and they can work and have a  
25 family, get a life. They can thrive both those who

2 consider New York their hometown as well as those  
3 like myself who are fortunate enough to come later in  
4 life and get here as soon as I could. All of the  
5 work that we're doing right now is with that in mind.  
6 This is a great competition for talent across the  
7 country right now. And so, I think that this  
8 opportunity that we have as the world's greatest city  
9 to compete actively. And this is a lot of the work  
10 that I'm doing with the CUNY system, and one of the  
11 reasons, as I mentioned, is that I'm so thrilled to  
12 have Samuel Innocent as part of our VAB. Is that we  
13 want to act--we want to take a page out of New York  
14 City's immigration history. You know, where this  
15 became the place, the magnet where folks from all  
16 over the world came and the retooled and prepared for  
17 the rest of their lives. We think that with our  
18 veteran population, oddly enough many of them after  
19 over 13 years of war do feel a bit like immigrants in  
20 their own home country.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And so, we have a  
23 number of initiatives that we're working with CUNY on  
24 right now, and we'll be glad to share more with you  
25 as--as they develop. But they're all aimed at the

2 very challenge and the opportunity that you've  
3 identified. Men and women in uniform coming out of  
4 those uniforms with a great, great set of skills and  
5 values, and the discipline and the global experience.  
6 They are coming back to our country with skills, with  
7 strengths at a time that our country, our city has  
8 never needed those skills and strengths more.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right. On that note,  
10 a little commercial. We're having our second annual  
11 Jobs Fair. I note that we just got the flyer made  
12 yesterday. So we're having it on Friday, May 22nd  
13 for Veterans. Redmond and the--Eric Bernstein, the  
14 Committee Counsel emailed it to the VSOs, and your  
15 office. And, you know, the more veterans that come  
16 the better. We definitely want to connect veterans  
17 who are seeking employment with employers who want to  
18 hire veterans. I mean, quite frankly, veterans, as  
19 you know, make the best employees. They're dedicated.  
20 They're hard working. They have so many skills.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It's not only the  
22 right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's just smart.  
24 They're always on time--



2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] It's  
3 a great investment.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --they really--the  
5 make the best employees, and I think there's an  
6 unfair stigma that veterans have because people  
7 unfairly assume that all veterans suffer from PTSD or  
8 that all veterans are not able to perform a duty or a  
9 tasks. That's not fair because it's not--it's not  
10 the case. It's--it's probably one of the biggest  
11 misconceptions that exist. I just want to move on,  
12 and then--and then we have to call up the next panel.  
13 And you've been so accommodating. Thank you. I  
14 mean, you've been on the--in the hot seat for an hour  
15 and a half so I want to be respectful of your time as  
16 well.

17 And recently, there have been some  
18 criticisms of the Administration and MOVA regarding  
19 veterans issues. Some of those individuals are going  
20 to come here and testify today. What I want to do is  
21 give you the opportunity to either respond to some of  
22 those criticisms whether you think they're warranted  
23 or not warranted. Or, give your own reassurance that  
24 this administration is committed to veterans issues  
25 and solving problems that veterans face. So I think

2 that's only fair because I don't want you to sit here  
3 and listen to some people and some of the advocates  
4 get up and just, you know, say what they want to say,  
5 and you might have a chance to kind respond because  
6 of how these hearings are set up. So anything that  
7 you would want to say to the public, to the committee  
8 and to those advocates that the administration is  
9 committed to veterans issues and the challenges that  
10 veterans face.

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, thank you,  
12 Mr. Chairman. You know, as I've said both to this  
13 committee as well as at the first VAB board as well  
14 as to reporters who engaged with us after the  
15 announcement of the VAB, we've got great advocates in  
16 New York City. And, whether it be the march on City  
17 Hall, or the social media chatter or the impassioned  
18 testimony here at this committee or the conversations  
19 that I have informally with advocates, veterans,  
20 their families all over--all over the city. It's  
21 energy, and I see that as a positive thing. I would  
22 be much more worried if it was radio silence. I will  
23 say this that we're all entitled to our own opinion,  
24 but it is important to share the same set of facts.  
25 And so, I would say that going forward let's--let's

2 argue about the facts and make sure that we get the  
3 facts right, and then we're entitled to our own  
4 opinions. As you and I both know, we've agreed to  
5 disagree, and we'll no doubt continue to both agree  
6 and agree to disagree, and do so without being  
7 disagreeable. So, I--I would also like to make one  
8 other point on this because it's been said numerous  
9 times, and I just want to clarify something. While I  
10 appreciate the support of folks from the community  
11 who have--who have testified, who have told me that  
12 they support me in my role, let's be very clear. I  
13 was appointed by Mayor de Blasio, and if you or  
14 anyone else has a problem with the Mayor, you've got  
15 a problem with me. So let's just make that clear,  
16 and let's have that dialogue and move forward working  
17 together. We've--we've got such an opportunity  
18 before us. And I couldn't be more thrilled. You  
19 know the--as we said at the first VAB meeting, you  
20 know, we've had just these great pioneers that have  
21 worked with us for the last several years. Many of  
22 their terms were expired. We knew we were going to  
23 renew and refresh the VAB with the reforms that were  
24 legislated. And we always knew that, of course, we  
25 would remain engaged with all who have gone before

2 building on that foundation, and that's what we're  
3 doing. And this VAB is absolutely the right set of  
4 individuals at the right time appointed by both the  
5 Mayor and the speaker. And I just couldn't be more  
6 excited about the way ahead. So, you know, let's--  
7 let's keep after it, and Mr. Chairman, I welcome the  
8 input. I'm listening, and it will inform all of our  
9 efforts at MOVA as we go forward in a spirited  
10 dialogue and that keeps its eye on the prize, which  
11 is improving the lives of all of our New York City  
12 veterans and their families.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I want to thank you  
14 for that. My last question is regarding Intro 314,  
15 have you--are you able to--if you're not it's okay--  
16 but have you had any conversations with anyone in the  
17 administration regarding the legislation. Is there  
18 anything in the bill itself that is troubling or  
19 problematic or any hesitations that anyone has in the  
20 legislative divisions maybe that they've had a chance  
21 to review it? And, you know, is it a concern for the  
22 Administration that, you know, we have over 40 co-  
23 sponsors, which is a veto-proof majority. That if we  
24 were to pass the bill even over the Mayor's  
25 objections, that we could override the veto, and that

2 it would be the first veto in the administration  
3 regarding Intro 314.

4           COMMISSIONER SUTTON: We have had  
5 discussions about the bill certainly. So we  
6 initially debated it last September. And my view on  
7 this, which I have communicated at all levels of the  
8 Administration when we've addressed this is that this  
9 needs to remain an open questions for all of the  
10 reasons that I talked about in my testimony. That,  
11 you know, it's mission and strategy that have to  
12 drive programs and budget. So, at this point, the  
13 most important thing that I can do as MOVA  
14 Commissioner is to build this foundation. We're in  
15 the midst of it right now. Part of that foundation,  
16 you know, in the military we had a--had a thing  
17 called DOTLMPF and then it expanded to DOTLMPF.  
18 Well, what in the world is that? Well, whenever we  
19 are in a position to make changes, to move from where  
20 we are some place else in an organization, what the  
21 DOTLMPF framework gives us is space to assess what  
22 are the different factors that--that are involved and  
23 what is their role. So Doctrine, D, is how we fight.  
24 O is organization. How do we organize. T is  
25 training. Do we need to do some more training, and L

2 is leadership, which encompasses communication. It  
3 encompasses, you know, setting the moral tone, the  
4 climate, the rules of engagement. And then there's  
5 material. What's the stuff? What are the supplies?  
6 What is the equipment? What do we need there. P,  
7 personnel. What personnel do we need, and F  
8 facilities. What are the facilities. So those are--  
9 you know, I take lessons from my military experience  
10 the DOTLMPF is one of those lessons. Whenever  
11 assessing what changes are needed, fill out a little  
12 matrix, and I'm in the midst of that right now. And  
13 so my counsel to the Administration has been, listen,  
14 I got this. This is in my court right now. I'm  
15 building the foundation. I make the most use of our  
16 existing authorities. We haven't even begun to plumb  
17 the potential that lies across the City agencies, but  
18 we're on it. We're in the midst of this. And so, I  
19 would just say that it remains an open question. But  
20 that's not today's imperative for me. And I  
21 appreciate as Council Member Vallone and others have  
22 said you have your role, I have my role, and I will  
23 continue relentlessly to bring MOVA up to scale to  
24 reach its full potential. And, we'll be in a  
25 different position then to assess where we are, and

2 what kind of a mission and strategy requires what  
3 kinds of programs and budget.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Commissioner Sutton,  
5 thank you so much for coming, for your testimony, for  
6 your leadership on behalf of New York City's veterans  
7 and their families. I know they couldn't have a  
8 stronger advocate than you. Thank you very much for  
9 being here. Thank you. We are going to hear from  
10 our first panel. John Rowan representing Vietnam  
11 Veterans of America. Jason Hansman representing Iraq  
12 and Afghanistan Veterans of America. Paul  
13 Schottenhamel representing the Allied Veteran  
14 Committee of Ridgewood and Glendale, also the  
15 American Legion; and Oswaldo Pereira representing New  
16 York City Public Advocate Letitia James.

17 [pause]

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You may seat in any  
19 seat you like--sit in any seat you like. The  
20 Committee Council will Administer the oath, and we'll  
21 start from right to left. And the next panel we'll  
22 start from left to right. So we'll start with John  
23 but first we'll ask Eric Bernstein, Committee Counsel  
24 to administer the oath.

25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can you raise your  
3 right hand, please? Do you affirm to tell the truth,  
4 the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your  
5 testimony before this committee, and to respond  
6 honestly to council member questions?

7 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] I do.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And we'll ask the  
9 clerk to put--we have a lot of people to testify.  
10 Normally, I do four minutes. We're going to keep it  
11 to three minutes, though, because have about 30  
12 people who have signed up to testify if that's all  
13 right? If you go over a little bit, it's fine, too.  
14 All right, John, please when you're ready.

15 JOHN ROWAN: Yes, sir. First, I'd like  
16 to thank the Speaker for my reappointment to the  
17 Veterans Advisory Board. I'm one of the few  
18 holdovers. Because of the time limitation, I'm going  
19 to just focus one aspect of the Commissioner's  
20 testimony and the issues. And that's the issue of  
21 the service representatives, the claim people. The  
22 only thing that was a problem with that grant was it  
23 wasn't long enough. There's no way that anybody can  
24 be there for a year or even two, and get through the  
25 system, and have their claims come back. In fact,



2 I'd be very curious as to what happened to the claims  
3 that weren't finalized or that had to go for appeals.  
4 And while it's true that the Veterans Benefits  
5 Administration has brought down the waiting time for  
6 claims, initial claims, unfortunately, it's been at  
7 the expense of the appeals process. which is now a  
8 disaster. And I won't go into that unless somebody  
9 asks me a question. So I disagree with the  
10 Commissioner's statement that the resources were ill-  
11 advised. I think the resources just were not  
12 sufficient. It's interesting that Nassau, Suffolk,  
13 Westchester, Rockland and probably almost every other  
14 county in the State of New York has a veterans  
15 agency. That they all provide service  
16 representatives, service officers or whatever title  
17 that you want to use and help their constituents file  
18 their claims. The City of New York does not, and  
19 that hasn't happened. In fact, they have done it in  
20 many, many, many years, unfortunately.

21           From a purely economic development  
22 standpoint, it would pay the City to hire claims  
23 representatives because it would bring a significant  
24 amount of income into the city's coffers. Far many,  
25 many, many times the actual budget of the VAB even if

2 it tripled. So, I think that's really a poor use of  
3 money, if you want to talk about a poor use of  
4 resources. They don't--they are not spending  
5 anywhere near enough of what they ought to spend.  
6 Years ago, the State Director of Veterans Affairs  
7 established that an average counselor would bring in  
8 about \$6 million in benefits. That's probably gone  
9 up--a year. Now, that's only after they've been  
10 working for a couple of years because it takes so  
11 long for the things to go through the--the system,  
12 and to get all this retro money and all kinds of  
13 other prospects. The other thing that's interesting,  
14 too, is the number of veterans that actually served  
15 in the combat zone in the last two was in Iraq and  
16 Afghanistan is getting up almost the same amount of  
17 number of actual veterans who served their country in  
18 Vietnam in the combat zone. That's a staggering  
19 number when you think about it. The difference  
20 being, of course, is they took in all the Guard and  
21 Reserve people, which are all local people. That's--  
22 that's going to be--it will affect us in the city  
23 here over time if we want to keep these people in the  
24 city, which I hope we do. So that the idea that the  
25 one direct service they should be providing is that

2 service rep program. It's the one thing that,  
3 frankly, is negligent [bell] in this city, and we'll  
4 talk later about that.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Just  
6 pass the mic down, and we'll continue down the row.

7 OSWALDO PEREIRA: Good afternoon members  
8 of the City Council, Committee on Veterans. My name  
9 is Oswaldo Pereira. I'm an Outreach Coordinator for  
10 the Office of the Public Advocate, Letitia James and  
11 I'm also a Veteran. I was an Army Combat Medic for  
12 the years of 2006 through 2010, and served two tours  
13 in Iraq. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity  
14 to address the committee on behalf of the Public  
15 Advocate Letitia James. Before I begin, I'd like to  
16 reiterate that I'm reading this testimony on behalf  
17 of the Public Advocate and not myself.

18 Over the past few months both I and  
19 representatives from my office have met with leaders  
20 from a host of organizations representing the  
21 interests of veterans including Disabled med--  
22 Disabled Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan  
23 Veterans, the Wounded Warrior Project, the United War  
24 Veterans Council, the American Legion, New York Metro  
25 Vets, New York City Serves, New York City Veterans

2 Alliance, the National Association of Black Veterans  
3 and the Bronx Veterans Mentors. The overwhelming  
4 consensus among these veteran groups and others is  
5 that the Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs most be  
6 strengthened to meet the growing needs of the New  
7 York City veterans community and their families.  
8 Unfortunately, today many veterans throughout New  
9 York City feel forgotten and uncared for. Many have  
10 expressed the sentiment that of all cities in the  
11 U.S. our city should rise to meet the challenge of  
12 caring for our veterans. Our city, which was  
13 ruthlessly attacked 14 years ago by a small group of  
14 terrorists and experienced the largest terrorist  
15 attack that our nation has ever suffered should  
16 better understand the sacrifices that our veterans  
17 have made, and the needs that result from those  
18 sacrifices. New York City veterans return home after  
19 serving in the longest war that this nation have ever  
20 seen, and sacrifice parts of themselves both  
21 physically and emotionally that they can never  
22 regain. To think that our veterans would have to  
23 return home to fight even further for the most basic  
24 right, basic services seems both unjust and  
25 unpatriotic.

2           Three weeks ago, I stood on the steps of  
3 City Hall where there was a large group of veterans  
4 assembled to protest, calling for better services and  
5 demanding to be treated with the respect that they  
6 have surely earned. While I know that much of the  
7 fault lies with the Federal V.A., I can help--I could  
8 not help but think about what we were doing locally.  
9 Disappointingly, our Mayor's Office of Veteran's  
10 Affairs is not funded in a way that reflects the  
11 actual needs of our veterans. With a staff of six  
12 and a budget of \$600,000, MOVA is not in a position  
13 to provide the services that our veterans truly need.  
14 Think for one moment about the numbers. We have over  
15 200,000 citywide with a budget of \$600,000. That  
16 means we're allocating just \$3.00 per veteran.  
17 Veterans deserve to have a department that can truly  
18 deserve their needs--truly serve their needs. I am  
19 concerned that MOVA, as it is currently funded, does  
20 not have the resources necessary to serve the needs  
21 of our veterans. As we head into Executive Budget  
22 negotiations, I urge this committee, the rest of the  
23 City Council and our Mayor to please give our  
24 veterans the support they both need and have earned.  
25 [bell] Pretty good, huh?

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You can read the  
3 last line if you'd like.

4 OSWALDO PEREIRA: No, the last line is  
5 thank you again for the opportunity to speak.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: He literally was at  
7 the last line. That was great. Good timing.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And thank you  
9 for your service.

10 PAUL SCHOTTENHAMEL: I'm Paul  
11 Schottenhamel from the--I wear many hats in the  
12 veterans community, but today I'm here with the  
13 Allied Veterans Committee of Ridgewood and Glendale.  
14 We run the Memorial Day Parade in Ridgewood, and it's  
15 made up of six veterans organizations, three American  
16 Legion posts, two VFW posts and DAV chapter. And we  
17 were discussing this last night at our meeting about  
18 what's going on here. When we looked at MOVA, we see  
19 an uneven performance over the years. It's very  
20 dependent upon the support of the Mayor on how he  
21 feels everything--what should be. And, because the  
22 office is very--within the Mayor's Office, it allows  
23 little oversight by the City Council and outside the  
24 normal checks and balances that the government  
25 normally has over departments. So it's lot a lot of

2 it's--it's not as well represented. Without a strong  
3 Veterans Committee Council the City Council does not  
4 always oversee what's going on in the veterans  
5 community. And that's because it's buried within the  
6 Mayor's Office. For MOVA to be working, it really--  
7 working well, you need a dynamic Commissioner. We're  
8 lucky that the last two commissioners have really  
9 moved MOVA in the right direction. But, it's not set  
10 up organizationally to continue that--that movement.  
11 If we don't have a good solid commitment from the  
12 Mayor, and a good dynamic commissioner, all that work  
13 can be undone within a year or two. So we have to  
14 make sure that this--this can continue to build on  
15 what we're doing here. And I really think that the  
16 quality--the quality of the commissioner and--and the  
17 Mayor is not well served without having a department  
18 there. That department would institutionalize this,  
19 and make it easier for all the successes that we're  
20 building on now to continue in the future and to make  
21 it more successful. We also have a big problem with  
22 in the Veteran community getting funding from various  
23 City Council members because it's got to get  
24 channeled through different departments. Support for  
25 our parade right now is coming through Youth

2 Services. They have nothing to do with the veterans.  
3 They don't care about the veterans. So it sometimes  
4 slows things down. By having a separate department,  
5 this money could probably be better funneled through  
6 to the veteran community. And I think we would have  
7 more oversight in what is actually [bell] being spent  
8 on the veterans in New York City. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. We'll  
10 save the questions until they're done. Jason.

11 JASON HANSMAN: Chairman Ulrich, Council  
12 Member Vallone, my name is Jason Hansman, an Iraq Vet  
13 and the Director of External Program Relations at  
14 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. On behalf  
15 or our New York City membership, we would like to  
16 extend our gratitude for the opportunity to share our  
17 thoughts on the role of MOVA in serving this city's  
18 veterans. IAVA is the only major veterans service  
19 organization headquartered here in New York City, and  
20 boasts a membership of over one--or 10,000 veterans  
21 in the New York City area. Given our close ties to  
22 New York City, we would like to see it as a leading  
23 city on veterans issues. However, to be this  
24 national leader, we need a city level agency



2 supporting veterans that is highly effective with  
3 clear priorities and goals.

4           We want to begin by thanking Commissioner  
5 Sutton for her hard work and dedication over the past  
6 eight months. She has been front and center at  
7 veterans events across the city. Has met with many  
8 veterans groups including IAVA in her first months in  
9 office. We are also encouraged to see Commissioner  
10 identify her office's priorities: mental health,  
11 homelessness and veteran employment. At the same  
12 time, it is clear that this office is ill-equipped to  
13 handle the breadth and depth of issues that veterans  
14 face in this city given its current staff size and  
15 budget. Currently, there are over 230,000 veterans  
16 that reside in New York City. And in the city budget  
17 of over \$60 billion we only allocate \$600,000 to  
18 veteran services. That's just \$2.50, less than a cup  
19 of coffee per veterans in this city. To say nothing  
20 of veterans' families. Currently, the city of New  
21 York spends more on the Mayor's Office of Film,  
22 Television and Broadcasting, approximately \$1  
23 million, than it does on veterans.

24           Recently, IAVA polled our New York City  
25 membership on--and what they told us was

2 overwhelmingly that the city just is not listening to  
3 them. Only 5% of survey respondents agreed or  
4 strongly agreed that the Mayor is listening to our  
5 veterans and service members, and only 4% of veterans  
6 surveyed agreed that the Mayor was improving the  
7 lives of veterans and service members. Our members  
8 are demanding more--more support and more resources  
9 and more leadership from the Mayor. It would be  
10 disingenuous and dishonest to say that we are leading  
11 the way here in New York City when it comes to  
12 veteran services. We only need to look to the north  
13 to the city of Boston where they spend \$5.5 million  
14 on veteran services. Or to San Francisco where the  
15 Mayor recently announced a two-year \$1.7 million city  
16 commitment to end veteran homelessness. Both of  
17 these cities and their mayors have shown up to  
18 support veterans while we in New York City are still  
19 waiting on ours.

20           But this is not just about budgets. What  
21 about services, and as of right now especially with  
22 the elimination of benefit counselors from MOVA last  
23 year, MOVA provides little to no direct services.  
24 And while there are critical functions that can be  
25 played outside direct services, this city--direct

2 services, this city and its veterans need the city to  
3 step up and provide critical services to our  
4 veterans. There would be no stronger message [bell]  
5 of support by our Mayor and our City Council than to  
6 establish a Department of Veterans Affairs for the  
7 City of New York, which is why we are here today to  
8 support this bill. There is no question that we have  
9 a long ways to go here in New York City to be the  
10 leading city in the country for veterans, and to that  
11 end IAVA looks to be a resource for this committee  
12 and for MOVA. But we need MOVA and we need our Mayor  
13 to take the lead. Thank you for your time, and I  
14 welcome any questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: All right, thank you  
16 very much. I have a few follow-up questions quickly  
17 and then I'll ask Council Member Vallone, and then  
18 we'll move onto the next panel. I do want to mention  
19 again we have about 30 people that signed up to  
20 testify. So we want to be respectful of their time.  
21 Jason, we'll start with you because you were the last  
22 to testify. You spoke about the poll that you  
23 conducted with your members--with the New York City  
24 membership. What was the sample size on the poll?  
25 What are the questions that you asked? Are you going

2 to publish that poll? Like I haven't seen it. I  
3 don't remember seeing it. Maybe it's on the Internet  
4 and I just wasn't paying attention. I don't know,  
5 but how many people did you actually poll and what  
6 are the questions that you asked them?

7 JASON HANSMAN: Right, so we--we sent it  
8 out to our entire membership. So our entire 3,500  
9 members in the--in the city of New York. We got a  
10 couple hundred back. I'd have to look back at the  
11 actual results. We asked a wide range of questions  
12 so about their reactions to the Mayor, to the  
13 Speaker. And just generally about how they feel  
14 they're being treated as veterans in the community.  
15 I'm not sure about our plans to release the entire  
16 survey, but we have released I think--that's about  
17 half the survey there that--that we have.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I understand, but I  
19 mean you bring it up as a snapshot and as a poll that  
20 you--an internal poll that you conducted. But, the  
21 only way it's helpful to this committee or to the  
22 administration is if we know how many people you  
23 spoke to, what are they unhappy about specifically.  
24 What are there questions that were asked? Is there a  
25 disparity between boroughs? I mean look at the data

2 and the cross-cutting statistics there, you know, it  
3 would be incredibly helpful for us if it came to, you  
4 know, introducing legislation or advocating for a  
5 particular cause or a policy that's working or not  
6 working. I just think like it's--it's fine to say  
7 that we do--we did a poll and that's great. A poll  
8 is terrific. Any time we can capture data is a good  
9 thing, but when we capture that data, I think we  
10 ought to make it public and share it with everybody,  
11 good, bad and otherwise.

12 JASON HANSMAN: Yeah, I--I absolutely  
13 agree with you, Chairman. I think what we want to do  
14 is do a larger poll in the future to kind of capture  
15 a lot of those policy issues and where the pain  
16 points are. So to really dig deep into that 5%.  
17 What we wanted to know was the immediate reaction of  
18 our members and not add that extra level of kind of  
19 digging deeper. I think what we saw from this is  
20 that we need to dig deeper, not just as IAVA, but as  
21 a city, and to how and why our vets are feeling this  
22 way.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The other question I  
24 have regarding your testimony you said that San  
25 Francisco, the mayor recently announced a two-year

2 \$1.7 million city commitment to end veterans  
3 homelessness. What--what is the distinction you're  
4 making there between city commitment and federal  
5 money?

6 JASON HANSMAN: So they're--they're  
7 committing actual city resources. So the--the \$1.7  
8 million would not be coming from the VA but actually  
9 out of the City budget to support the homelessness.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, how much--how  
11 much--I should have asked this before. I don't know,  
12 but how much money is the federal government giving  
13 to each city? Does it vary? Is it the same amount?

14 JASON HANSMAN: It varies very much city  
15 to city I mean especially when we're talking about  
16 SSVF grants, and we're talking about HUD VASH  
17 Vouchers it's going to vary. So we're going to get a  
18 lot more here in New York City. L.A. is going to get  
19 a lot more because of the size of their problem than  
20 every somewhere like San Francisco or like Seattle or  
21 even Boston.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But just to be fair,  
23 we'll have the Committee Counsel send MOVA a list of  
24 questions that we want to follow up on that we didn't  
25 get a chance to ask them. We'd like to see how much

2 money the City is contributing to the effort to end  
3 veterans homelessness here, and how much money we're  
4 getting from the federal government. I don't know  
5 those numbers. I'm sure we'll find those out.  
6 Lastly, Mr. Schottenhamel, It's funny you brought up  
7 the funding in your testimony. So I have an American  
8 Legion Hall in my district. I'll just use this as  
9 the example. I gave them a small amount of  
10 discretionary money about \$5,000. It's actually a  
11 lot of money for them, but in the grand scheme of  
12 things it's not a lot of money, right? I mean groups  
13 get \$50, \$100, million dollar grants. They've been  
14 waiting for two years to get this money because it  
15 goes through DYCD and DYCD administers thousands of  
16 grants for after school programs, for summer camps.  
17 There are a whole bunch of worthy causes. But  
18 somehow or another the veterans groups it takes a  
19 really, really long time to get that money. And I  
20 know I'm not the only one because I have other  
21 colleagues in the Council who want to fund Jewish War  
22 Vets, Catholic War Vets, VBA, American Legion. Part  
23 of the problem is that it goes through DYCD. It  
24 doesn't have its own agency to go through. So, can  
25 you tell me your difficulties, your experiences with

2 trying to access money for the Garrity [sp?] Post or  
3 any other post in Queens that you're active with?

4           PAUL SCHOTTENHAMEL: Well, I'm familiar  
5 with what was going on the Rouff Norelli Post in your  
6 district, and some of the problems they've been  
7 having. And right now, they're not even sure if  
8 they're going to be able to keep their building based  
9 on their finances right now, and the money that you  
10 allocated to them is--would keep their heads above  
11 water. As far as our parade is concerned, for the  
12 last couple of years we have been getting small  
13 grants from--from Elizabeth Crowley's Office, and--  
14 but--but once it--once it gets to Maspeth Town Hall,  
15 it gets bungled down in the administration over  
16 there. One of the problems I currently have right  
17 now is that they're requiring to come out of that  
18 grant is insurance for our parade, which is--which is  
19 fine. They're giving us insurance that is actually  
20 less than the cost that we've been paying local  
21 insurance companies for the parade. The problem is  
22 we haven't see that yet. And the City of New York  
23 Parks Department in order to give us our reviewing  
24 stands for the parade because we need one at either  
25 end of the parade can complete their paperwork until



2 we provide them with the insurance information. And  
3 we're still waiting on that, and it's been months.  
4 And so, I don't know if we're even going to be able  
5 to get reviewing stands at this point. All because  
6 of the bureaucracy, and when we go back and try to  
7 get it all squared away, we don't know who to talk  
8 to.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah. By the way,  
10 just for the record, I learned when I became a member  
11 of the Council it's actually called the Wenger Wagon.  
12 Did you know that that's the name of the reviewing  
13 stand? That that's the product's name, Wenger? I  
14 didn't know what that is, Wenger Wagon. When I heard  
15 it, I thought it was hilarious. [laughter] Anyway,  
16 but--but if you have a problem with the Parks  
17 Department getting a reviewing stand, I'm sure that  
18 MOVA would be more than happy to call someone at  
19 Parks to try to intervene. And, maybe get a letter  
20 from OMB or something proving that you've got this  
21 funding. You're just waiting on it and, you know,  
22 they can give you the reviewing stand for the parade.  
23 I don't--that's something that is right up their  
24 alley so-- But it is a serious problem, funding wise  
25 for VBAs--for VSOs. I know the VBA had a--

2                   JOHN ROWAN: Just quick, the Maspeth Town  
3 Hall we mentioned, they actually work with the City  
4 and do the grant, and they get a cut, a small  
5 percentage. I forget what it is, 5 or 10% of the  
6 money to act as their--as the Veterans Administrative  
7 arm because we can't do it directly because of the  
8 C19s and a whole bunch of other nonsense.

9                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's a--it's kind of  
10 a complicated internal budget thing that we've been  
11 talking about with the City for years, even when  
12 Mayor Bloomberg was in office. Because not all of  
13 the VSOs are 501(c)(3) or (4)s. They're under a  
14 different IRS designation, but they're still tax  
15 exempt, but somehow OMB doesn't accept that. It's  
16 just a problem for these smaller posts that survive  
17 on that money to put on their parades, the Memorial  
18 Day activities, their Veteran related functions. And  
19 they're important parts of the community, and they've  
20 been around for a really long time, and they serve a  
21 very important purpose. And, the only way they're  
22 going to be able to survive is if we're able to  
23 support them with City tax dollars, which we want to,  
24 but to make it just a little bit easier. Yeah. Last  
25 follow-up on that, John.

2 JOHN ROWAN: I just want to make one  
3 comment here. When you have to finagle something to  
4 route money through other departments the way this  
5 has to, it almost sounds like there's some  
6 misappropriation of money that's out there, which  
7 there's really not. But it--it gets a little crazy.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I know, it's not  
9 misappropriation.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I just want to--  
11 yeah, I'm going to join in your frustration.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You're--you're  
13 acting through a conduit. The problem is, as we've  
14 discussed off and on the record, is that if you want  
15 to fund a senior center it goes through DFTA. If you  
16 want to fund an arts program, it goes through DCA.  
17 Id you want to fund an after school program, it goes  
18 through DOE. If you want to fund a tennis camp at  
19 Forest Park, it goes through Department of Parks. If  
20 you want to fund Veterans, it has to go through DYCD,  
21 and DYCD is administering thousands of applications,  
22 and it just takes a long time. It's a problem.  
23 Yeah.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yea, so I'm just  
25 agreeing with the panel and with Chair Ulrich. You

2 know, I think our two districts are probably the most  
3 active and house probably the most veterans, and we  
4 have very active parades and each one of our veteran  
5 groups are reaching more to the community for help.  
6 Because when we do try to fund, and Council Member  
7 Ulrich and I go through the same problem, we get tied  
8 up and we feel the frustration. And that's why you  
9 heard why we're championing to try to get this  
10 finally done. But, first, I want to thank Veteran  
11 Pereira for your two tours. You know, I think every  
12 veteran that comes before us--

13 OSWALDO PEREIRA: [interposing] Thank  
14 you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --we thank you  
16 because we're fighting for what you've done for us.  
17 So we thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes, thank you for  
19 your service and thank you for your testimony. We're  
20 going to call up the next panel. We're going to hear  
21 from Scott Davidson, Kristen Rouse representing New  
22 York City Veterans Alliance, Joe Bello representing  
23 New York City Metro Vets and Lee Covino a veterans  
24 advocate from Staten Island.

25 [background comments, pause]

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, we're going to  
3 start from left to right this time, and before we  
4 begin with Kristen, we're going to ask the Committee  
5 Clerk Eric Bernstein to administer the oath.

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

11 PANEL MEMBERS: I do.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, Kristen,  
13 please begin your testimony.

14 KRISTEN ROUSE: Good afternoon, Council  
15 Member Ulrich and members of the committee and  
16 Commissioner if she's still here and distinguished  
17 guests. My name is Kristen Rouse. I'm speaking on  
18 behalf of the New York City Veterans Alliance. I'm a  
19 veteran of the United States Army. I served three  
20 tours of duty in Afghanistan, and I have lived in  
21 Brooklyn since leaving Army active duty in 2007.  
22 While we appreciate the service and efforts of  
23 Commissioner Sutton and her statement today, the  
24 Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs remains little  
25 more than a symbolic office. With the Commissioner

2 and five staff members, MOVA doesn't have people to  
3 field a softball team let alone a veteran--let alone  
4 oversee veterans affairs for the nation's largest  
5 city. This affects not only the city's 220,000 or  
6 more veterans, but also the 250,000 or more spouses  
7 and dependents directly impacted by veterans benefits  
8 and programs in New York. This in total represents  
9 about 1 in 16 New York City residents, who MOVA's  
10 functions or dysfunctions directly impact. Today, we  
11 heard the Commissioner's statement, and listening to  
12 that, we completely understand that MOVA gets around  
13 and has a long meeting calendar with many agencies  
14 and organizations, which we're glad to hear. But  
15 meetings themselves are not outcomes. The number of  
16 addresses or names and email lists on the meeting  
17 calendar are not performance metrics. We've heard  
18 for some time now about big plans and initiatives by  
19 MOVA, but as Council Member Vallone pointed out, you  
20 know, just the \$54 million Mental Health Initiative  
21 released by the Mayor in no way mentions veterans,  
22 and it does not validate the Mental Health Initiative  
23 that the Commissioner has told us about for some time  
24 now. So, we're wondering where--where is the  
25 strategic plan of which the Commissioner speaks?

2 Where are the specifics and where is the funding  
3 behind all of these initiatives that we keep hearing  
4 about. We're happy to hear the VA's reported success  
5 rates, but we're wondering if the Commissioner  
6 actually matches up those success rates with veterans  
7 in the community who might have something else to  
8 say.

9           The Commissioner states the need for all  
10 of us to be talking about the same facts. Yet, she  
11 seems to gloss over the SSVF programs or other  
12 federal funding and programs that she is only  
13 tangentially involved with as city official and not  
14 empowered to in any way oversee those. So we offer  
15 some recommendations on moving forward with MOVA or a  
16 future Department of Veteran Affairs.

17           Number one, New York City Government must  
18 allocate more funding. We need to see more staffing  
19 and resources to include restoration of the Veterans  
20 Benefits Counselors that MOVA lost last year, and  
21 that the Commissioner implied today may not be  
22 needed. We believe they are needed. [bell]

23           Our second recommendation is New York  
24 City government must empower MOVA not just to meet  
25 with, but to actually oversee and coordinate city

2 funding and programs targeted at veterans to include  
3 the \$400--\$400,000 of discretionary funds the City  
4 Council gives to veterans organizations, as we've  
5 mentioned. MOVA should also oversee and account for  
6 the full expenditure of the \$3.4 million in federal  
7 funds that City Hall receives from the federal  
8 government for--to end veteran homelessness. We  
9 don't believe that she actually has oversight of  
10 this, even as she wishes to tout it. Which is a  
11 great program, but I'd like to see an accounting for  
12 all \$3.4 million of this, and how MOVA is involved.

13 Our third recommendation is that MOVA  
14 must function as true liaison for the New York City  
15 veterans community, not just as a cheerleader for  
16 programs like the VA and SSVF programs. We need  
17 somebody representing us in government to these  
18 federal programs to ensure that the quality is there.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: If you want to wrap  
20 it.

21 KRISTEN ROUSE: I can go on, but thank  
22 you for the opportunity to testify to day.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you.  
24 I'm sorry, it's just that we have so many, and we  
25 want to be respectful. Yes, sir, go ahead.



2                   SCOTT DAVIDSON: [off mic] Good  
3 afternoon, Chair Ulrich, members of the New York City  
4 Committee. [on mic] Good afternoon, Chair Ulrich,  
5 members of the--members of the New York City  
6 Committees on Veterans, small businesses, guest,  
7 Commissioners and everybody else that I may have  
8 missed. My name is Scott Davidson. I serve as  
9 President and CEO of Vets GSA, Vets MS, which is--  
10 which are service disabled veteran owned small  
11 business. I also serve as the co-founder of the not-  
12 for-profit organization 360 Veterans with Lieutenant-  
13 Colonel Justin Constantine of the U.S. Marine Corps,  
14 which hosts the New York City Veterans Resource Expo.  
15 I serve additional with the American Legion's  
16 National Veterans Small Business Task Force in  
17 Washington, D.C. I'm a medical retired Army captain  
18 and served two combat tours in Iraq, and I was  
19 medically retired for combat related injuries I  
20 received while I was serving in Iraq.

21                   My focus to day is speak about the  
22 effectiveness of MOVA. As I'd like to start to focus  
23 on the stated mission and function of MOVA, which is  
24 that the agency advised the Mayor on missions and  
25 initiatives impacting the veterans and military

2 community. Also stated in its mission is that MOVA  
3 works with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the  
4 other New York City Agencies, veterans organizations  
5 and other stakeholders to offer services to veterans,  
6 their dependents and spouses. While encourage  
7 innovative partnerships to ensure creative problem  
8 solving, the reason I state this is because I want to  
9 be clear so we understand the positions and  
10 responsibilities of this particular office. With  
11 that being said, my non-profit has personally worked  
12 with MOVA with regard to providing services for New  
13 York veterans at the New York City Veterans Resource  
14 Expo, which was held this past March 5, 2015. We  
15 have also--we are also currently working close with  
16 MOVA for an upcoming expo on June 5th. Our Veterans  
17 Resource Expo provides veterans, spouses and  
18 caregivers with a multitude of resources in one  
19 setting related to veteran education, employment,  
20 health, business and housing. And we continue to do  
21 so as we work and move forward with MOVA and other  
22 city resources such as SBS and other agencies around  
23 the city.

24 MOVA, the Small Business Service--I'm  
25 sorry--MOVA, Small Business Service and many other

2 organizations came together for an incredibly  
3 successful event for veteran outreach for resources.  
4 MOVA did coordinate efforts within our office--within  
5 their office to assist us, and although at the time  
6 Commissioner had just inherited an office that was  
7 facing an onslaught of shortfalls of a tremendously  
8 oversaturated system that probably had not been  
9 efficient since opening the office back in 1987. We  
10 can't hold her responsible. Regarding the  
11 effectiveness of MOVA, I believe that any perceived  
12 inaction or under-serving of the New York City  
13 veterans community is driven by a combination of  
14 overwhelming demand and lack of resources. And not  
15 from the type of inaction on Commissioner Sutton's  
16 part. Primarily, there should be a realistic  
17 expectation from both the Mayor's Office and other  
18 individuals that would be extremely difficult to  
19 serve a 250,000 plus veteran population with a staff  
20 of four people. Most agencies with that mission have  
21 a greater staff and established partnerships that  
22 have been well developed over years in order to serve  
23 the general population, or in this case, a very  
24 specific large demographic. Understandably, there is  
25 a much greater focus on MOVA in recent times given

2 the influx of returning veterans from wars in Iraq  
3 and Afghanistan to an already strained system, which  
4 cannot handle the job transition, mental wellness,  
5 homeless and disability issues. It should not be a  
6 surprise that a very small city organization that has  
7 limited resources [bell] and no funds cannot meet  
8 immediate expectations of timelines that have been  
9 set. By no means am I saying that that's acceptable  
10 to not serve the veteran community at all, but I also  
11 believe that we have to be realistic about what we're  
12 providing an agency or an office in order to serve  
13 that community.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you.  
15 We'll ask questions in the end, but just in the  
16 interest of time we'll get Mr. Bello next. How is  
17 your wife doing? Is she doing better.

18 JOE BELLO: She hopefully will get out by  
19 Friday.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh, thank God. All  
21 right, well our prayers are with her--

22 JOE BELLO: [interposing] Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --for a speedy  
24 recovery.

2                   JOE BELLO: Chairman Ulrich and Council  
3 Member Vallone and committee members, thank you for  
4 giving me the opportunity to appear today to talk  
5 about the effectiveness of the Mayor's Office of  
6 Veteran's Affairs. The Commissioner went over a host  
7 or a litany of items that the--MOVA is doing,  
8 advising the Mayor, enhancing coordination of  
9 services and a host of other things. The office also  
10 has additional responsibilities of working with the  
11 city's Veterans Advisory Board, the U.S. Department  
12 of Veterans Affairs, State Division, and other city  
13 agencies, veterans organizations as well parades,  
14 ceremonial functions. So even listening to the  
15 Commissioner talk about what she's been doing in the  
16 Mayor's Strategic Plan, we see that that doesn't  
17 necessarily line up with what the office is required  
18 to do. The main reason the office had difficulty in  
19 carrying out these requirements is something that  
20 advocates have been talking about for many years now,  
21 the lack of a limited staff and a budget.

22                   However, if we're going to talk about  
23 evaluating the effectiveness of the office, in my  
24 opinion it's difficult to assess because of the lack  
25 of personnel, the lack of funding, the transparency

2 and communication. Commissioner Sutton came into the  
3 job in September of last year and immediately went on  
4 a 90-day review. Subsequently, though, following her  
5 90-day review, there has been little communication to  
6 the community as a whole as to what the office is and  
7 will be doing, or what her thoughts are on how to  
8 make the office more proactive. Therefore, the  
9 question that's being asked in the community in terms  
10 of evaluating the effectiveness of the office is:  
11 What is Commissioner Sutton doing differently to  
12 enhance MOVA that former Commissioner Holliday  
13 wasn't? At this moment, there doesn't appear to be a  
14 definitive answer. So we have to look elsewhere. A  
15 few weeks ago in an interview of Capital New York,  
16 Commissioner Sutton applauded the advocates' energy  
17 and enthusiasm while stating the advocates are  
18 impatient, I'm impatient, we're all in this together.

19 As Commissioner, Ms. Sutton is  
20 responsible for the direct communication between the  
21 Administration and the City's veterans community.  
22 Part of her responsibility is to talk to and educate  
23 the Administration so that they better understand  
24 that for all veterans like all communities in this  
25 city, all politics are local and services, help and

2 compassion begins at home. We all know that Mayor de  
3 Blasio talks about his father serving in the Army  
4 during World War II, losing a leg in Okinawa and the  
5 struggles he faced when he returned home. I've said  
6 it before that this gives the Mayor a unique insight  
7 into the difficulties veterans face on an everyday  
8 basis. And Commissioner Sutton has stated that she  
9 would not have taken the job if she wasn't sure how  
10 much he is committed to veterans. Therefore, it is  
11 frustrating and once again difficult to evaluate the  
12 office when the Commission states in one publication  
13 that she is impatient, and says in another that she  
14 came into knowing that this Mayor and this  
15 Administration would commit whatever support,  
16 whatever tools, whatever resources are needed.

17           And yet, when asked last week and today  
18 to comment on the need for a city's veterans  
19 department, had no comment. These statements in my  
20 opinion revealed the major issue in evaluating any  
21 effectiveness of MOVA, a disconnect, a lack of will,  
22 a lack of recognition, or even a disagreement of  
23 policy between City Hall and the Commissioner, and/or  
24 the Commissioner and the community or both. With  
25 over a decade of war, it is not longer to just--

2 enough to just hold the title of Commissioner of  
3 Veterans Affairs in one of the greatest cities in the  
4 world, and have no resources to back it up. Ms.  
5 Sutton would be Commissioner in name only, and that  
6 not only makes her job [bell] harder, but tarnishes  
7 her credibility, which is already starting to take a  
8 hit with the community. While making it much more  
9 difficult in restoring and having veterans keep trust  
10 in MOVA. Therefore, I would properly--probably  
11 evaluate the effectiveness of MOVA. I would urge  
12 this committee to vote out, and I would ask every  
13 council member to support Intro 314.

14           It is time to create a freestanding  
15 direct service agency that cannot only have  
16 preliminary executive budget hearings on veteran  
17 issues, but can funnel contracts awarded to veteran  
18 service providers in this borough--in the boroughs  
19 directly instead of through other city agencies. In  
20 conclusion, with Memorial Day coming up, the  
21 Administration has an excellent opportunity to  
22 address in a serious way the current problems and  
23 needs of this city's veterans. During his campaign,  
24 Mayor de Blasio stated that veterans issues are  
25 personal to him, and that they will be an important



2 of his Administration. Even Commissioner Sutton  
3 stated last September that Intro 314 deserves all due  
4 consideration as we dedicate ourselves to the  
5 historic journey that lies ahead. It's time for the  
6 Administration to get on the same page, join with  
7 this committee and the Council and move forward.  
8 With the United States still at war and veterans  
9 returning home, and may veterans coming to New York  
10 for better economic opportunities, this office can do  
11 better. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Mr.  
13 Covino.

14 LEE COVINO: Good afternoon. Honorable  
15 Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee  
16 on Veterans and fellow veterans. I appreciate the  
17 opportunity to comment upon the effectiveness of the  
18 Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs. In the absence  
19 of the Commissioner's long awaited 90-day review of  
20 the office, I'm unable to comment upon future plans  
21 of the office. So, I'll limit my comments to  
22 observations of the current situation. My name is  
23 Lee Covino, past Vice Chairman of the City's Veterans  
24 Advisory Board where I served from 2002 to last  
25 month. I also previously served as the Staten Island

2 Borough President's Veterans Affairs Advisor from  
3 1990 until I retired in March of 2014. I'm currently  
4 serving as the Treasurer of the United Staten Island  
5 Veterans Organization, Inc., the primary sponsors of  
6 our Annual Memorial Day Parade on Staten Island. And  
7 along with several vets organizations, most of which  
8 are represented under the umbrella of USIVO.

9           To understand where MOVA is today, I  
10 think it's important to know the general history of  
11 governmental infrastructure, which has evolved over  
12 the years. Back in 1987, the City Charter  
13 established the Veterans Advisory Board, but for  
14 whatever reasons, appointments were not made by the  
15 main Speaker until 2001, a full 15 years later. Also  
16 in 1987, there was no committee on veterans, only a  
17 subcommittee on veterans chaired by Victor Robles.  
18 The Council Committee on Veterans Affairs was  
19 established in the 1990s, but few public hearings  
20 were held and it seemed just a plumb for many years.  
21 Beginning with Chairman Hiram Monserrate, a Desert  
22 Storm veteran, the committee has become much more  
23 effective and attentive to the issues affecting our  
24 veterans. Meanwhile, MOVA was headed by a director  
25 and sparsely staffed with few external resources.

2 Very few direct services were offered to veterans as  
3 the director tried his best to represent the office  
4 at events in all five boroughs, as well as address  
5 major problems like avoiding Potter's Field burial  
6 for indigent veterans.

7           In 2008, Mayor Bloomberg okayed [sic] the  
8 office of Commissioner Levin [sic] with little or no  
9 enhancement of budget or resources. Direct services  
10 offered to veterans by MOVA continue to be an  
11 illusive objective for the office as the years  
12 passed. In 2014, under Commissioner Terry Holliday,  
13 a grant to train and certify three veteran claims  
14 officer was obtained. This represented the first  
15 time that a direct service component from MOVA was  
16 established. With state government and local veteran  
17 service organizations at historic low staffing levels  
18 within the five boroughs, it seemed like an important  
19 service to maintain as new discharges from the  
20 military returned to the city. But it was not to be.  
21 The Mayor failed to include funding for the three  
22 councils in its Preliminary Budget, and the Council  
23 failed to pick up the budget item in the Adopted  
24 Budget. The end result the three councils were lost.

2                   One of the biggest misconceptions  
3 promoted by the media is that the City funds MOVA  
4 with \$500,000 annually. The truth be known, the  
5 Fiscal Year 15 portion of MOVA's budget was a paltry  
6 \$262,000 [bell] according to the Capital Gazette.  
7 The balance is funded by the State, and the City only  
8 funded 57% of MOVA's FY budget. In closing, there's  
9 no reason why the City can't do more for its veterans  
10 including the thousands that are expected to return  
11 to the five boroughs in the coming years. There's no  
12 reason why the Mayor can't lobby for greater state  
13 match while increasing MOVA's budget proportionately  
14 to include restoration of the three Benefits  
15 Councils. That's why I support Intro 314, which  
16 would establish the City Department of Veterans  
17 Affairs. Hopefully, this agency would have minimum  
18 staffing requirements, which would include the claims  
19 officer function to be made available to all five  
20 boroughs. It's time to create a freestanding direct  
21 services agency with baseline funding that is not  
22 subject to the discretionary funding of the Mayor.  
23 Thank you.

24                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you very much.  
25 I have a few questions, and I have a few questions,

2 and then we'll move onto the next panel. I know  
3 folks here are still waiting. I wanted to go back to  
4 I think it was Kristen's testimony. Let me find it  
5 so I'm not misquoting you in any way. Do you have it  
6 handy? Thank you. Give me one second here. I had  
7 highlighted it earlier. Regarding MOVA we were  
8 talking about how you think New York--how your group  
9 that you're representing thinks New York City should  
10 spend more funding on staffing and resources for  
11 MOVA. I agree. How much do you think MOVA should be  
12 funded at?

13 KRISTEN ROUSE: Well, as the Commissioner  
14 herself has mentioned, there needs to be a strategic  
15 plan, and--and once--once we see a plan, then it--  
16 then it should--that plan should be resourced. Like  
17 the plan should be--the resources should be scaled to  
18 the plan rather than the plan being scaled to the  
19 resources.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right, and do you  
21 think that MOVA should engage in direct services or  
22 be a provider of direct services? I know some people  
23 have different opinions about that.

24 KRISTEN ROUSE: So, I--I believe that  
25 those three veteran benefits or the claims counselors

2 should be restored because they--they were there  
3 before. And it's great to have outside funding from  
4 Robin Hood but, you know, veterans in New York City--  
5 like veteran services by New York government should  
6 not be considered a charity. They are an essential  
7 function of New York City government. Three claims  
8 counselors is not going to serve the entire New York  
9 City veterans community, but it's going to help, and  
10 so-

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] I  
12 liked--I liked your comparison. You brought it up,  
13 was that your? To the Mayor's Office of Film or was  
14 that--

15 KRISTEN ROUSE: [interposing] No, that  
16 was Jason.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh, that was Jason.  
18 I'm sorry Jason.

19 KRISTEN ROUSE: It was a great point,  
20 Jason.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That was interesting  
22 that we spend more on the Mayor's Office of Film than  
23 we do on the Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs.  
24 Look, I think the important point is that  
25 Commissioner Sutton is just the messenger in a

2 certain respect. You know, she is not the one saying  
3 well that's the amount of money she wants. I think  
4 if the Council--if she did have an agency, for  
5 instance, and the Council put a million dollars in,  
6 any Commissioner would love have an extra million  
7 dollars. They can hire more staff. They can  
8 contract. They do more outreach. They can print  
9 more materials. They can reach more people. They  
10 can take out ads in social media. I mean there's a  
11 whole host of ideas. The root of the problem and a  
12 very, you know, utilitarian--from a purely  
13 utilitarian point of view is that we fundamentally  
14 believe that MOVA is under-funded and does not have  
15 the resources that it needs to carry out the mission.  
16 There are a lot of private organizations out there  
17 that are doing great work, but that does not make up  
18 for or take away from our responsibility to properly  
19 fund MOVA in budget of \$77 billion. So, I don't want  
20 anybody to leave with the wrong opinion that  
21 Commissioner Sutton doesn't want more money, or that  
22 she wouldn't take more money. I'm sure if she had  
23 more money, she'd find a way to spend it like any  
24 Commissioner would in any agency. But, I think that  
25 this goes--I think this rises to the level of the

2 Mayor and the Mayor says this is an important issue  
3 to him. The best way to prove that and to keep  
4 everybody quiet is to put more money in. Tomorrow,  
5 we'll be looking to see when he's announcing  
6 tomorrow, right, the--the updated budget numbers. If  
7 the Administration was smart, they'd dump a million  
8 dollars in MOVA. Half their problems go away. Not  
9 all their problems, but a lot of their problems go  
10 away. The fact that they're reluctant to allocate  
11 more expense funding in MOVA is deeply, deeply  
12 troubling to me. And I don't understand what is  
13 motivating that, or what is informing that especially  
14 when people from all across the city, from all the  
15 boroughs from all the groups, you know, agree that  
16 they want to see more money spent on veterans at  
17 MOVA. Yeah, go ahead.

18 SCOTT DAVIDSON: I'm sorry. I have one  
19 point, though, if I could bring up about money.  
20 We've seen year after year at the VA, they have given  
21 them an avalanche of money. It's never been  
22 allocated, you know, as far as properly spent for  
23 that matter. So the only reason I'm going to say is  
24 that we want to make sure that although that it would  
25 be great to take out a million dollars. And, you



2 know, Commissioner Sutton is, you know, a very, very  
3 bright woman. She knows exactly what she needs to  
4 get done. Is it enough. We gave all the money to  
5 the VA. Look at the spending trends in 2001 plus and  
6 you go onto it specifically to engage returning  
7 veterans. If you look at what the IG recent reports  
8 have shown how mis--how misappropriated the money has  
9 spent on the wrong things. And look at the disaster  
10 that goes on across the healthcare system, is money  
11 just the solution? Is it going to be the strategic  
12 programs that are actually associated with that--with  
13 that money? How do we see those programs? Because  
14 we got the smartest people in government sitting down  
15 there in Washington, D.C., if you want to call it  
16 that. But, I'm sorry, they put a lot of people and a  
17 lot of time and effort into making these programs  
18 that are supposed to work for returning veterans like  
19 myself and, you know, people sitting at this table.  
20 Again, and I'm not talking a little. A million  
21 dollars is a drop in the bucket. We're talking they  
22 are the only one year after year that have increased  
23 budget in the entire federal government. Take away  
24 the DOD spending going down. The VA has the largest  
25 increase every year, year after year, and look at the

2 disaster that the VA system has. So the money isn't  
3 the answer. It's how it's going to be spent, and who  
4 is going to spend that money, and what programs are  
5 being used.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's a given.

7 That's for sure.

8 KRISTEN ROUSE: Well, and to your point,  
9 is--where--where is the plan. The Commissioner has--  
10 I'm not upset that the Commissioner talks about using  
11 existing resources. But she listed all of these  
12 programs that are external to her that she has been  
13 leading with, which is--which I would expect her to  
14 be doing. But yet, those are--those are programs  
15 that she does not have oversight of. And are not  
16 part of the--MOVA's funding. So what is the  
17 strategic plan, which she spoke of several times, and  
18 where is the funding to accomplish that strategic  
19 plan. Like what--what are the resources that are  
20 being allocated within MOVA by MOVA staff to  
21 accomplished stated ends, which are very unclear.  
22 Like to--to use the example of mental health as a  
23 priority for MOVA and the Mayor for veterans. Yet,  
24 it's mention nowhere in the--in the Mayor's, you  
25 know, \$54 million budget for Mental Health.

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It's interesting,  
3 but it's worth noting that she technically doesn't  
4 have to be here. You know that? It's not a city  
5 agency. I mean like she is--I think she is to be  
6 commended for coming here, testifying hearing praise  
7 and criticism because she's not a city agency. The  
8 Finance Chair is not sitting next to me, Amadeus,  
9 [sic] like other agencies when we have budget  
10 hearings for the Parks Department, the Education  
11 Department, the Department of Health where you have  
12 the Finance Chair and the chair of the committee  
13 overseeing that issue. This is not a budget  
14 oversight hearing. The fact that we're even having a  
15 second oversight hearing on MOVA in one year, and  
16 she's only been on the job since September I think is  
17 very commendable. My problem is not with her. My  
18 problem is with the Mayor because I don't think that  
19 the Mayor is making veterans a priority in the  
20 budget, and he's woefully underfunding this office  
21 when there's so much work to do. And, I think she's  
22 stuck in a very difficult position. That's all. So  
23 if there's constructive criticism, I want to hear it  
24 of the Council, too, by the way. We're not immune to  
25 criticism or suggestions. If there's something that

2 we need to be doing better, we want to hear it from  
3 the advocates. But, at the same time, I would hate  
4 to see an avalanche of criticism on Loree Sutton when  
5 she's doing the best with what she has because she's  
6 not the one setting the budget. And by the way, if  
7 the Council could give her more money we would, but  
8 because it's under the Mayor's Office we can't. And  
9 that's why we want to create a city agency.

10 JOE BELLO: And that's why I think I made  
11 the point of my testimony being like her statements  
12 and the Mayor's statements because they just don't  
13 jive together. So that's why I said there just seems  
14 to be a real disconnect somewhere at City Hall  
15 whether somebody is not communicating with each  
16 other, or the Mayor just doesn't want to hear. [

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] I--I  
18 would agree with that, and I'll use the example, as I  
19 have in the past, of Mayor de Blasio sending a memo  
20 to Governor Cuomo urging him to veto the Veterans  
21 Pension Bill that the advocates spent ten years  
22 lobbying Albany to pass. And I've had conversations  
23 with the Mayor directly on this issue. I'm very  
24 disappointed. I think in a very symbolic way that  
25 showed the level of disconnect between the

2 Administration, the folks in City Hall, on the other  
3 side of City Hall and the veterans Community who  
4 lobby and tirelessly work on behalf of not only  
5 disabled veterans and homeless veterans, but middle-  
6 class veterans and older veterans, and veterans who  
7 have spent their civilian lives post their military  
8 career raising their own families here. Staying in  
9 New York, not moving to Florida and some other State.  
10 And, I think that that was fundamentally wrong. But  
11 I can't blame Commissioner Sutton for that because I  
12 don't--because she was not responsible for that.

13 JOE BELLO: But she's the one that has to  
14 eat it.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: She is the one that  
16 hear it because she is the Mayor's Commissioner. I  
17 agree with that, but the buck stops with the Mayor.  
18 If the Mayor cares about veterans, prove it. Put the  
19 money in the budget, and prove us all wrong, but  
20 that's what we're waiting for. So, we're waiting to  
21 be proven wrong. The last comment, and then we have  
22 the next panel.

23 LEE COVINO: As much as I fee about the  
24 Red Sox, I would look at the City of Boston and their  
25 local Veterans Department. Perhaps talk to some

2 folks in the agency. See how they operate. What  
3 kinds of direct services do they offer and, you know,  
4 what does it do for the city? There's a common  
5 misconception that the VA is be all and end all of  
6 all veterans' needs, and that's absolutely not true.  
7 And the more populous you get in the urban setting,  
8 the less true it is. So, let's look at the folks who  
9 already invented the wheel and that's Boston.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I will say this  
11 before the--before the committee hearing is over, the  
12 Council is going to pass the bill. I will make sure  
13 of it. If I spend every chit and every dime, breath  
14 that I have in my body trying to get this bill to the  
15 floor I will do it with or without the Mayor's  
16 support. With or without his objection. If he wants  
17 this to be first veto of his Administration, that's  
18 his right. He's the Mayor and I have 40 co-sponsors.  
19 You only need 34 to override the veto, and I think a  
20 lot of my colleagues would be hard-pressed to reverse  
21 their position when they signed on as a co-sponsors  
22 to say that we need a Department for Veterans  
23 Affairs. What I want, though, is the cooperation of  
24 the Administration. I actually want them to come to  
25 the table and tell us we don't like this line. We

2 don't like that you called it this or you called it  
3 that. We have a better idea. This should be worded  
4 differently. The Administration has not done that.  
5 We have attempted to negotiate the bill with the  
6 Administration for several months now. I have never  
7 gotten a phone call saying, Do you want to sit down  
8 and talk about this? I'm still waiting, but I don't  
9 know that we can wait any longer because I have  
10 veterans halls that are going to close. I have  
11 advocates that have been pushing for this bill, and I  
12 have more than enough co-sponsors on the bill not  
13 only to pass it, but to override a veto. So at some  
14 point, this is going to come to a critical mass, and  
15 that point is coming very soon. I can't say when or  
16 how, but the day is coming.

17 LEE BELLO: We really appreciate your  
18 efforts, too. We're watching.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you very much.  
20 We're going to call up the next panel. Rob Pachota  
21 representing Small Business Development Center.  
22 Frank La Marsh representing the American Legion  
23 Staten Island; Ryan Graham, VFW, Queens County  
24 Commander; and Dan McSweeney. Oh, he left. Okay,  
25 well, I thought I saw him earlier. Dan McSweeney

2 representing United War Vets Council. We'll call up  
3 one from the next panel. The next person is Anthony  
4 J. Martino. So those four folks. Is Mr. Martino  
5 still here? Anthony J. Martino, 6419 Metropolitan  
6 Avenue, Middle Village, Queens County. No? All  
7 right, we'll call up the next one then. Hold on.  
8 We've got to get four. Matthew Silverstein  
9 representing American Works, and Craig Carolina also  
10 representing American Works. So, we'll call them up  
11 together. [background comments] I'll ask the clerk  
12 to swear in the panel and then we'll start with the  
13 testimony.

14 [pause]

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can you all raise  
16 your right hand, please. Do you affirm to tell the  
17 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in  
18 your testimony before this committee, and to respond  
19 honestly to council member questions?

20 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] I do.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Can we start with  
22 America Works and we'll go to the left.

23 MATHEW SILVERSTEIN: Thank you, Mr.  
24 Chairman and the other council members for having us  
25 today. This is fourth time testify--testifying



2 before this committee. We echo a lot of statements  
3 that were said earlier. At the end of the day,  
4 everyone thing Commissioner Sutton is very energetic,  
5 and has her heart in the right place, but she's  
6 working within a construct that does not serve the  
7 veterans community as they could be served and as  
8 they could be served. MOVA needs metrics. They need  
9 a clear mission. They need to go before a committee  
10 and state exact numbers on how many veterans they  
11 help, how they help them, in what way they help them?  
12 Did they achieve their goal? Did they fall short of  
13 the goal? Why? The only way you could really do  
14 that is with a formal department, with formal goals,  
15 with a formal budget. American Works is a name you  
16 already know. It focuses on job placement. That's  
17 what we exist for. Since 2009, we've helped about  
18 700 homeless veterans find employment. Over our 30-  
19 year history, we've helped over 12,000 veterans find  
20 employment, and over 500,000 individuals find  
21 employment in general. We think MOVA just in one way  
22 if they were a formal department in the way they  
23 could help veterans just like HRA, Small Business  
24 Association, they have formal goals for employment.  
25 MOVA could have formal goals for employment. They

2 could self-contract it out. They could be a formal  
3 department like any other, and with formal goals  
4 there could be greater accountability.

5           CRAIG CAROLINA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman  
6 for letting us speak. Just one quick point, the  
7 Commissioner said earlier, she was talking about a  
8 task force that she created, or that different  
9 department heads were a part of regarding those seven  
10 SSVF providers. Well, one of the things, which we  
11 just wanted to reiterate is that putting in a plan to  
12 end veteran homelessness is good, and we support  
13 that, too. But if you don't also have a plan for--  
14 for making sure that every veteran gets a job that  
15 wants one, that plan for homelessness is going to  
16 fail. America Works and the Black Vets of Social  
17 Justice have a grant from the Federal Department of  
18 Labor to help our veterans find jobs. It's about a  
19 million dollars over the course of three years.  
20 There's another provider from the Small Business  
21 Services Administration that has Workforce 1 Center  
22 just for veterans. And, we are not part of those  
23 discussions, and we are not included in those--that  
24 task force. So I think it's great and--and I  
25 personally don't see if you give every veteran a

2 place to live this year, if they don't have a job we  
3 know that within a year or two, they're going to lose  
4 those--those homes. So we want to see that we're  
5 part of the equation.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Have  
7 you asked to be put on the task force?

8 CRAIG CAROLINA: We've spoken to her.  
9 We've had some discussions, and quite frankly from  
10 the last administration to the current one with our  
11 involvement it's gone down. We saw in the past MOVA  
12 used to have a clothing closet, which was actually  
13 another one of the direct service pro--providers and  
14 it was actually good. We could send every veteran  
15 that we had to MOVA and they were given a suit. And  
16 we know that to find clothing in this city for men is  
17 very difficult. For women there are a lot of  
18 different organizations, and every single veteran  
19 that we--every male veteran is given a suit. But  
20 they are no longer given that, and it's very hard for  
21 us to find them a job if they don't have proper  
22 clothing. So we see that MOVA did in the past  
23 actually provide services. We held job fairs with  
24 them. We--we don't any more. They were actually  
25 sending us referrals. They don't any more. So we

2 think that MOVA plays--they do--they can play a very  
3 vital role in the city with administrating and  
4 coordinating. And we think if they were a  
5 department, they could do that, and we think that  
6 General Sutton is perfect for the task.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Next up.

8 FRANK LA MARSH: Good afternoon, Mr.  
9 Chairman. I'd like to thank the committee for the  
10 opportunity to speak to you today as a member of the  
11 largest congressionally charged veterans organization  
12 in the world, the American Legion. Please allow me  
13 to briefly state our credentials in regards to the  
14 subject matter for today's hearing. The American  
15 Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919, as  
16 patriotic veterans organization. Focusing on service  
17 to veterans, service members and communities, the  
18 Legion evolved from a group of war weary veterans of  
19 World war I into one of the most influential non-  
20 profit groups in the United States. Over the years,  
21 the Legion has influenced considerable social change  
22 in America when hundreds of--hundreds of benefits for  
23 the veterans have produced many important programs  
24 for children and youth. The following are examples  
25 of some of the significant contributions the Legion

2 has made. The Legion's efforts have resulted in the  
3 creation of the U.S. Veterans Bureau 41 of the  
4 Veterans Administration. The past American Legion  
5 National Commander, Harry W. Colmery writes the first  
6 draft of what would later become the GI Bill of  
7 Rights considered the Legion's single greatest  
8 legislative achievement. For every dollar spent on  
9 educating veterans, the U.S. economy eventually gets  
10 \$7 back. The Veterans Administration is elevated to  
11 a cabinet level status as the Department of Veteran  
12 Affairs. The Legion fought hard for this change,  
13 arguing that veterans deserve representation at the  
14 highest levels of government. Today, as it--at its  
15 formation, the Legion remains at the forefront of  
16 efforts to improve education and other benefits for  
17 all veterans. I'd like to thank Mayor de Blasio and  
18 Speaker Mark-Viverito for their efforts in assembly  
19 the Veterans Advisory Board that will be in place to  
20 assist the Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs. I'd  
21 also once again to thank and commend the Mayor and  
22 the Speaker on the choice of Brigadier General Loree  
23 Sutton, U.S. Army Retired as the Commissioner. Our  
24 thanks also go out to the members of VAB who have  
25 willingly offered their time to help improve the

2 rights and benefits of our veterans. In addressing  
3 the purpose of this hearing, and to evaluate the  
4 effectiveness of MOVA's role in serving the New York  
5 City veterans, we must keep in mind a few key points.  
6 The new VAB was named within the past 30 days. Prior  
7 to them being announced, Commissioner Sutton is  
8 working with a lame duck board. I'm not sure what  
9 impact this has had in some of the Commissioner's  
10 decisions. In the short time the new VAB has been in  
11 place, they may not have had enough opportunity to  
12 provide the input necessary to produce quality  
13 results from the MOVA. In order to more effectively  
14 evaluate the success of MOVA, more time may be needed  
15 for the VAB and Commissioner Sutton to work together.  
16 Perhaps this type of hearing is a bit premature. It  
17 is the hope of the American Legion that the  
18 individual board members will be holding some type of  
19 veterans town hall meetings in their respective  
20 boroughs prior to the general meetings. This would  
21 be a great tool in assessing the concerns of the  
22 veteran community that can be discussed and then  
23 brought to the attention of Commissioner Sutton. As  
24 to the matter of the American Legion supporting the  
25 establishment of a New York City Department of

2 Veterans Affairs, it is our understanding and desire  
3 that the Commissioner and the board members remain  
4 [bell] intact. Additionally, the City Council must  
5 have a direct impact on creating the department's  
6 budget, which we see as having a very positive affect  
7 on improving the care of our veterans. As previously  
8 stated because of our experience in helping to  
9 establish the Veterans Administration and the create  
10 of the Department of Veteran Affairs, the American  
11 Legion is willing and able to assist with the  
12 creation of the New York City Department of Veteran  
13 Affairs. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much.

15 DAN MCSWEENEY: Thank you very much,  
16 Chairman Ulrich. By way of introduction my name is  
17 Dan McSweeney. I'm the incoming President of the  
18 United War Veterans Council. UWVC strives to gather  
19 and act as an honest broker for the seemingly  
20 disparate perspectives in the non-profit sector. To  
21 get to the matter at hand, under the right  
22 circumstances, MOVA offers convening authority for  
23 veterans in the arena of government, and that is  
24 obviously a vital function. However, for all the  
25 reasons we've heard today, the vast potential of MOVA

2 is not being fully realized. The core functionality,  
3 which a veteran-focused government entity could  
4 offer, must be allocated greater--greater resources  
5 and authority. UWVC is by its very nature a non-  
6 partisan, non-political organization, and we steer  
7 clear of politics in order to maintain our  
8 credibility as a veterans town square. What I can  
9 state very clearly, however, is that we look forward  
10 to continuing and enhancing our relationship in the  
11 city government in order to complement each other's  
12 roles, capabilities and opportunities as champions  
13 for veterans in New York. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Last,  
15 but not least for the panel.

16 ROB PACHOTA: Good afternoon. My name is  
17 Rob Pachota. I'm the Director of the Small Business  
18 Development Center. Chairman Ulrich, thanks for  
19 having us and thanks to everybody for staying to the  
20 bell. I'll be brief. My input--really I'll give  
21 testimony, but I'm just be sparing on this. My  
22 effort here today really is based solely upon MOVA  
23 has done in support of the vet entrepreneurs, and  
24 I've observed in my time here. I hope that the new  
25 Commissioner will want to utilize all resources in



2 assisting the many needs of our veteran business  
3 community. Commissioner Sutton, apparently has taken  
4 a deliberate approach to the challenges in front of  
5 her before making abrupt quick fixes, which I  
6 applaud. While the assessment periods and roadmaps  
7 are necessary, I do hope that the new MOVA leadership  
8 infrastructure recognizes that there are many other  
9 resources outside of New York City's governmental  
10 agencies that can assist in real entrepreneurial  
11 teaching, coaching and mentoring where appropriate.  
12 One-stop shops sometimes are not the best or only a  
13 solution for what an aspiring veteran entrepreneur or  
14 military family member may need. Collectively  
15 between New York City resources and other proven  
16 resources partners, MOVA's staff will someday be able  
17 to triage the right veteran to the right agency for  
18 the right outcome. This could be done only with all  
19 the subject matter experts in our space beyond just  
20 fellow New York City agencies.

21           Just a quick shout out. MOVA has got  
22 tremendous talent. They do so many things, and over  
23 the years I've worked with them. Folks like Inez  
24 Aiden and Letitia Olvera.[sp?] They're tremendous  
25 valuable partners. They've always worked with us very

2 effectively, and as they were on board--were on board  
3 with more--more people, if we have the same kind of  
4 folks, we're in good shape with the veteran  
5 community. There is a lot to cover at MOVA, and  
6 clearly it's the right commissioner for the job.  
7 However, the job is overwhelming. So, I focus  
8 strictly on the small business development aspect. I  
9 just want to emphasize that as she decides to triage  
10 out veterans as they come by for service, she needs  
11 to look at all the possible agencies. In the SBS'  
12 own controversial report that came out last year  
13 talking about what they can do for veteran  
14 entrepreneurs, even they said, well, we have to  
15 leverage other resources beyond just what's in front  
16 of us like the SBDCs. Today, I haven't got a phone  
17 call about helping at all with this process. And I  
18 just hope that the General as well as her staff look  
19 at SBDCs as well as WBCs, Women Business Centers,  
20 Business Outreach Centers and other SBA affiliates  
21 that could actually help with getting entrepreneurs  
22 and their family members better prepared to deal with  
23 small business issues. Thanks. I'll leave with  
24 that.

2                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, thank you,  
3 gentlemen. DO any of you have any opinions about if  
4 we were to abolish MOVA and create its own--create it  
5 as its own city agency, do you think there's--that  
6 there's anything negative there that would come from  
7 that? What do you think some of the negative  
8 consequences should be? I know we talked--we focused  
9 on the positive, but feel free to be honest with me,  
10 especially the American Legion. I know they were  
11 instrumental in getting the national VA up and  
12 running. What are some of the consequences do you  
13 think that might not be beneficial or potentially?  
14 Some problems that we might run into?

15                   ROB PACHOTA: Well, one of my concerns is  
16 that you'd--you would lose the continuity from--of  
17 what you've got today if you completely dissolved it.  
18 Taking out Commissioner Sutton and taking out the  
19 Advisory Board, you lose some valuable resources  
20 there. I think that--that would be a mistake.

21                   CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I think we're--we're  
22 going under the assumption that the second it's  
23 abolished that she would be nominated as the  
24 Commissioner and she would continue to be the  
25 Commissioner. We support her in her role as the

2 Commissioner. We think she's doing a very good job.  
3 We want her to have more funding. We want her to  
4 have more resources. We want to be able to be on the  
5 hook for funding the government agency that helps  
6 veterans in the city. That's the purpose of the  
7 bill. The level of continuity it's my impression  
8 that it would--it would be exactly the same just  
9 more. But if that's not the case then shame on us.  
10 I don't think that would ever be the case. But I'm  
11 just interested that everybody's jumping over the  
12 fence to support this thing, and that's a good thing  
13 I think. But nobody is offering the criticism of how  
14 the bill is written, or any--any of the short comings  
15 of the bill. Or, you know, one suggestion came out  
16 last year for instance, which I thought was very good  
17 is that they said why are you going to call the  
18 Department of Veteran Affairs, we don't want to  
19 confuse people. You don't want a veteran calling the  
20 City Department of Veteran Affairs thinking that he  
21 or she reported a medical condition or some other  
22 situation to the National VA. We don't want to  
23 confuse anybody to be ambiguous. So maybe even  
24 coming up with a different name. Another suggestion  
25 that came out of the last hearing was the definition

2 of a veteran, and how it doesn't match up with the  
3 State's definition of a veteran. It matches up with  
4 the VA's definition of a--of a veteran, which are--  
5 which are similar, but not the same. What I'm asking  
6 the advocates and the people here is read the bill,  
7 and tell me how to make it better. I'm asking the  
8 same of you that I've asked the Administration. Go  
9 back and read the bill. Tell me what works, what  
10 doesn't work, what's good, what's bad and how we can  
11 make it better. And that's really what we're looking  
12 for. So people say, why don't you pass the bill?  
13 It's not ready to be passed as far as I can tell. We  
14 are going to pass it at some point. But I want to  
15 get to a point that it's something that everybody can  
16 support. Everybody had a role in helping craft and  
17 draft, and people had the assurances that they needed  
18 that it was the right thing to do. I fundamentally  
19 think that it's the right thing to do. Forty of my  
20 colleagues and the Public Advocate agree, but I don't  
21 want to ram this through for the sake of scoring  
22 political points. I really want to get this done the  
23 right way, but I need people's help. I need  
24 constructive criticism. I need advice. I need  
25 suggestions. I want that from you, and I want that

2 from the Administration, too. So I'll leave you with  
3 that lastly.

4           ROB PACHOTA: Sir, I guess it's very  
5 comforting to throw money at a problem, and right now  
6 I think everybody is wanting to figure--we figure  
7 just give this problem a whole lot more money. It's  
8 going to get better, and I think that the potential  
9 downside is we can waste a whole lot of--a whole lot  
10 more money without some kind of--As Kristen  
11 mentioned, a strategic plan. I give you my pledge  
12 that I will read the bill in its entirety with--with  
13 looking with an eye towards benchmarks and milestone.  
14 Because unless we have some kind of ROI figured into  
15 this thing and we run this like a business, I stand  
16 to los e credibility as well as a whole lot more  
17 money. So right now we're losing a little bit of  
18 money if the--it things are done not so great. But  
19 if we throw a whole bunch more money at this thing,  
20 it could be rather disturbing.

21           DAN MCSWEENEY: Okay, if I could add one  
22 more thing. Earlier it was mentioned about the--the  
23 funding that was recently--it was announced just I  
24 guess for the mental health stuff. I think the  
25 greatest challenge facing our returning veterans

2 today are mental health issues. I would hope that,  
3 you know, if the bill passes, which we certainly  
4 expect that it will, that the funding would include a  
5 significant dollar amount for mental health issues of  
6 our returning veterans. And those that are--that  
7 have been here for some time now, Vietnam veterans,  
8 et cetera. Even World War II veterans. There are  
9 significant numbers that are suffering from PTSD that  
10 it's been going on for years and years and it's  
11 never--never come to the forefront. I just hope that  
12 the city recognizes that and does fund it.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, that's  
14 something that the City does have control over,  
15 mental health, housing, and access to employment. I  
16 mean there's a host of issues that the City can help  
17 veterans with and we do. I think we could do a lot  
18 more of it. And, I think we could do a lot more of  
19 it. And, I think if we had it as its own independent  
20 city agency under the leadership and direction of  
21 Commissioner Sutton, we would be able to hold them  
22 more accountable. Right now they report to the Mayor  
23 and that's about it. They get funded by the Mayor  
24 and that's about it, and we have very little say  
25 over MOVA and the direction of MOVA and assisting

2 with MOVA's mission and the vision of MOVA. So we're  
3 doing a lot, but we could do more, we could do  
4 better. That's the bottom line. I hope that people  
5 understood that that was the tone that we were trying  
6 to come across with today.

7 I'm going to call up the next panel.  
8 Christopher Cocaine-- Cohane left I think. Richard  
9 Rivera, Disabled Veteran Vendors is here, I think.  
10 Yep. Jennifer Rivera is also here.

11 JENNIFER RIVERA: [off mic] I'm here.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, ma'am.  
13 Brett Morash, Services for the Underserved, and Duane  
14 Gathers, the Coordinator for the Bronx Veterans  
15 Treatment Corps Mentors.

16 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] He's not here.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh, Duane--Duane has  
18 left the building like Elvis. Okay. What about  
19 these two. Jim Marxson. Is he still here? Mr.  
20 Marxson. He might have left and Veterans Business--  
21 it looks like Queens Boots--

22 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Whitelock. Yes sir.  
24 Okay. All right, if you'd like to join the panel,

25



2 sir, you can. You'll be on the lat panel. Whitelock,  
3 is that right?

4 MALE SPEAKER: Yes, it is.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yep. All right. So  
6 we will start the clock and we'll start from the left  
7 of there, move there.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: [off mic]

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. All right.  
10 Great. All right. Yep, all right. So we will start  
11 the clock and we'll start from the left with that.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: [off mic]

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, all right,  
14 great, all right. The Clerk will, not the Clerk, the  
15 Counsel will administer--administer the oath.

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

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You have my full  
22 attention.

23 BRETT MORASH: [off mic] Good afternoon,  
24 Councilman. [on mic] Sorry. Good afternoon,  
25 Councilman. My name is Brett Morash. I'm the Vice

2 President of Veterans Services for the Underserved  
3 and retired U.S. Naval Officer serving on active duty  
4 for over 20 years as Service Warfare Officer before  
5 retiring in April of 2013 into the role I now hold.  
6 Services for the Underserved or SUS is a large city-  
7 based non-profit that provides a whole spectrum of  
8 supports from the disadvantaged, or as the name says  
9 the Underserved of New York City. The division I  
10 believe is the largest provider of veteran services  
11 in New York City with the exception of the VA, with  
12 programs to serve veterans in poverty at highest  
13 risk. We provide veteran services including homeless  
14 prevention, employment and education programs,  
15 suicide prevention, mental health and physical health  
16 supports. As well as running the coordination center  
17 for the NYC Serves Network.

18           As a recently returning veteran, I know  
19 from personal experience that the transition from  
20 military service back to civilian life is not easy.  
21 It can have a lasting impact on one's ability  
22 employment, stable housing and integrate back into  
23 the community. While New York City is clearly a  
24 patriotic city, it is not a military city. And this  
25 is the reason I'm here today to discuss the

2 importance of MOVA's efficacy in the veterans space.  
3 [coughs] To start out, I can tell you that in my two  
4 years of working at SUS, I have seen a marked  
5 increase in the prominence of MOVA under Commissioner  
6 Sutton's leadership. Prior to her appointment, I can  
7 say emphatically that MOVA would have been the last  
8 place I would have looked for guidance. Today, I can  
9 equally say emphatically that is now the first.  
10 While MOVA may not directly coordinate efforts in the  
11 organization--it is the organization I believe is the  
12 right one to provide the unity of effort that is so  
13 desperately needed.

14 In my opinion, it's evolving role is  
15 clearly moving in a positive direction especially as  
16 it relates to steering the tens of millions of  
17 dollars of federal, state and foundation resources  
18 flowing into the city. As a complete divergent from  
19 the past, I've seen General Sutton adversely at all  
20 of the meetings I attend and most important the New  
21 York City's Continuum of Care Homeless Veterans Task  
22 Force meetings and the NYC Service Progress meetings,  
23 among others. If she doesn't attend, then MOVA's  
24 Chief of Staff, Katherine La Porte. There are other  
25 critical meetings that the Commissioner has

2 integrated into their plan and an equal essential  
3 role in the holistic approach in ending veteran  
4 poverty and homelessness. The selling point being  
5 that real opportunity for MOVA to make a difference  
6 is in their attendance and commitment to being a  
7 participant at those meetings and not just an  
8 observer.

9           For it is those forums where the  
10 strategic decisions are actually made that impact the  
11 operational decisions [sic] at the street level.  
12 Further, only MOVA is situated in a place to provide  
13 the impartial and confidence of these services.  
14 Excuse me, issues affecting the veteran community  
15 unbridled by gold driven funding while at the same  
16 time providing the leadership toward a common good of  
17 the myriad of providers including SUS, who are  
18 beholden to goal-driven funding. In essence, the  
19 providers have laid a track, [sic] but MOVA can truly  
20 enable the integrative approach to services  
21 dovetailing goals cohesively as part of the strategy.  
22 In my opinion, in order to best gauge the  
23 aforementioned strategic approach, the office needs  
24 the appropriate staffing. It will require the staff  
25 have experience and a greater understanding of the

2 programmatic nuance, implications of policy on the  
3 national level affecting the local and, of course,  
4 how the money works vis-a-vis goals.

5           For a provider, it's a business reality  
6 not just altruistic intent. But MOVA cannot be  
7 expected to do this [bell] with the dollar figure  
8 that they have currently available. And as just a  
9 single point of reference, I spend \$250 per veteran  
10 per year. She spends \$2.00 per veteran per year.  
11 And as I'd like to point just that--just to  
12 paraphrase Jackie Chiles it's outrageous, egregious  
13 and preposterous, and only the city is prepared to  
14 put the money where it needs to be. Thank you.

15           CHRIS CULHANE: Good afternoon. I think  
16 last time I came here I told you I'm a potential  
17 veteran entrepreneur. I'm here to start a business.  
18 I wanted to take advantage of the promise made in  
19 1994 by the State of New York that the City campaign  
20 to eliminate in the introduction of the law to give  
21 you 35(a) of the General Business Law. So, now what  
22 MOVA has done for me is shown the Small Business  
23 folks that just came here and talked on the last  
24 panel. And so now I know that that resource is there  
25 for me, various legal resources that I could take

2 care of. [coughs] So while not direct services,  
3 they are services that I have taken advantage of, and  
4 that I will take advantage of in the future that  
5 they've introduced. Now coming here as a veteran to  
6 New York City having not joined with the military in  
7 New York I decided to settle down here because I  
8 found my wife here. I wanted to stay because when I  
9 got here I went to 23rd Street VA and they had an  
10 Iraq, Afghanistan advocacy or social work office that  
11 really helped me get established. They sent me to a  
12 place called Veterans Upward Bound where I got a  
13 start on my college education where I, you know,  
14 integrated the veterans benefits on a federal level  
15 and the ones on a state level using their offices at  
16 the VA. Now, if I'd known there was a MOVA I might  
17 have gone there, but I had no idea that it even  
18 existed. And that was in 2009, and this thing was  
19 introduced in '87. So, yeah, let's us know it's  
20 there. We might take advantage of it. The other  
21 thing is that when I saw this office, I saw a great  
22 potential for the veterans of New York City in that  
23 they're bringing what the Commissioner sad a veterans  
24 hall together. And I would like to see more of that,  
25 veteran services organizations sitting side-by-side

2 with her in a great big space in New York City. So  
3 that we can come there as not just a one-stop for  
4 direct services. But where, hey you could just go  
5 across the hall where they're--there's--they're set  
6 up and we're leasing it to them for maybe, you know,  
7 \$100 a month to get that office. That would be  
8 awesome to see as a veteran coming home from--well, I  
9 came from Iraq--I guess, just to get started. And  
10 they would have had those same things, Veterans  
11 Upward Bound and all of that and then Mitchell-Lama,  
12 they got me an apartment in Manhattan, which was very  
13 nice. [bell] And, he's going to say the rest of it,  
14 I'm sure. He's a veteran vendor, and will get  
15 started in that law right there that you have, that I  
16 gave you.

17 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes, I have it here.

18 CHRIS CULHANE: He's going to speak  
19 volumes about what he's going to say.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You just had a court  
21 case in your favor.

22 CHRIS CULHANE: Not in our favor. The  
23 appellate decision was--was not in our favor as far  
24 as food vendors go.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I thought the City  
3 lost the appeal.

4 CHRIS CULHANE: Well, okay, so on the  
5 Article--Article 78 Proceeding no. Well, okay, so  
6 they lost it in one respect, but they gained in  
7 another respect.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, all right.

9 CHRIS CULHANE: Okay, so it's still a  
10 slap in the face.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: It is a slap in the  
12 face.

13 CHRIS CULHANE: It's still an ambiguous  
14 law.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We ought to life the  
16 cap, too, in my opinion.

17 CHRIS CULHANE: And those things that I  
18 highlighted were not in the Article 78 Appeal. So  
19 they could not even be looked at on the appellate  
20 level.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Mr. Rivera. Okay,  
22 you're next.

23 RICHARD RIVERA: Good afternoon,  
24 Councilman Ulrich and members of the committee and  
25 everybody present. As he said, I'm a veteran vendor.



2 It basically made me as being able to take and  
3 advocacy role, but I haven't really been out there  
4 vending too much, but I stay in touch with my peers.  
5 Basically, as you know, the--First, let me introduce  
6 myself. My name is Richard Rivera, a disabled  
7 veteran. I spent nine years in the military, four,  
8 which was in the Army, and then I finally made the  
9 right choice joining the Marine Corps. So I possess  
10 these licenses that are governed by 35(a), which is a  
11 state law. I have a Midtown license, which is  
12 referred to as a Blue License that allows me to get  
13 merchandise. I have a citywide permit, which is  
14 unlike the meat permit that has been established by  
15 the vet--the V permit, which allows them to vend on--  
16 food on parks property. Mine allows me to go  
17 anywhere in the city. My Blue License looks  
18 something like this, but as my peer here his is  
19 yellow.

20 This allows us to vend anywhere outside  
21 of the Midtown Court, which I'm kind of going to  
22 touch on in this hearing. As you know, the--  
23 basically the Rossi v. the City of New York court  
24 case is finally kind of like got reversed. Because  
25 in the past in the lat few years it was favoring

2 Rossi and all the vets but now basically in the  
3 Appellate Court they determined that 35(a) does have,  
4 you know, it has something to do with food. Okay,  
5 which was counter to what Mr. Rossi was actually  
6 saying. So, now, based on that, what--what the--the  
7 situation that it's creating now it basically creates  
8 all the pre-existing conditions that existed prior to  
9 his court case, which brought him to establish  
10 Article 78 to begin with. Okay, if you follow me. I  
11 know I'm not reading verbatim as what I typed here.  
12 Okay, so basically if it's going to stay as far as  
13 35(a) is connected to food then there's going to be--  
14 there's going to be a need for some clarification.  
15 For example, citywide permits on parks property, are  
16 they allowed or not allowed.

17 I, myself, the reason why I put that in  
18 there is because I was--I was told that citywide  
19 permits are not allowed any more on parks property  
20 where I was at. The cop he actually told me, you to--  
21 -you want to be here, get across the street. In  
22 retrospect meaning Midtown North across the street  
23 over to the 19th Precinct. The same park just the  
24 other side. A park is a park and this [bell] Okay.  
25 So the cops--the cops right now, you know, are

2 telling, you know, telling to say what you know about  
3 that and see where we're at. And they are--and then  
4 they're being told that if you want to come here to  
5 this side of the park on Midtown North Side, you have  
6 to go get a V. Well, keep in mind that would be like  
7 me taking my Blue and asking for one of these. Okay,  
8 being that I have citywide my permit allows me to  
9 anywhere. All right. Let me proceed onto the next  
10 thing here. Plus the--plus the disables veterans  
11 that have a citywide permit, they had it before the V  
12 permit ever even existed.

13           Okay, so, which was governed by 35(a) at  
14 that point. Now, if--if let's assure that, you know,  
15 for the same veteran to be able to vend on park  
16 property, you know, I imagine it should be in the  
17 disabled veteran's name. And, if doesn't require for  
18 the named veteran as permitted to be present, then  
19 are there any stipulations for the disabled veteran  
20 that is present such as workers compensation. Like  
21 what recently, they're trying to phase it in, the  
22 Department of Health saying, you know, everybody that  
23 has a permit if you have employees you have to have  
24 workers comp.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'm willing to stay  
3 after and talk to you one-on-one, but I do want to  
4 get to the next person that can testify. And we can  
5 finish this one-on-one if you'd like. I just don't  
6 want to--

7 RICHARD RIVERA: Okay. I just had a  
8 small--

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Okay.  
10 Go ahead.

11 RICHARD RIVERA: --piece here.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: No, go ahead. All  
13 right if you're going to read that.

14 RICHARD RIVERA: I'll just read it  
15 through. All right. So the disabled veterans are  
16 allowed to work and restrict the streets. In the  
17 event that a disabled veteran wants to work in a  
18 restricted street, but as a food vendor, even though  
19 the food vendor is not allowed on that restricted  
20 street, then the disabled veteran should be--the  
21 disabled veteran should be able to, not just  
22 merchandise. My questions are, are cops in the  
23 Midtown Corridor going to be educated to these facts?  
24 An example: The same cops that told me that I wasn't  
25 allowed to be on this side of the park they told me

2 not but you can't go over to that street either  
3 because food is not allowed there. You know, and  
4 that's--whereas a citywide permit allows me to go  
5 anywhere. It's in my name. It's not in the name of  
6 a non-veteran. It's in my name.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Ma'am, you are the  
8 last person. Thank you for staying and being so  
9 patient.

10 JENNIFER RIVERA: I'm the only female.  
11 Good afternoon, Councilman Ulrich, Committee Council  
12 and anybody else--anybody else who's left in the  
13 room. My name is Jennifer Rivera. As an outsider  
14 looking in and without any political affiliation and  
15 as an Army who was involved and continue to be  
16 involved in the veteran community, and I'm working in  
17 the mental health community as Director of Human  
18 Resources and Veteran Affairs and sit on the Board of  
19 Suicide Prevention, I want to discuss the following.

20 The Mayor made a concerted effort to  
21 appoint Commissioner of Veteran Affairs who had  
22 current experience and understanding of how the brain  
23 works. What I--what I call brain runs. The  
24 importance of understanding the residual effects of  
25 PTSD inherent in the veteran community such as

2 depression, bipolar, isolation, homelessness,  
3 joblessness, aggression, incarceration, suicide, et  
4 cetera. Based on veterans' needs, the Mayor elected  
5 someone who chose service as her career, and also  
6 chose to serve veterans as a health professional.  
7 Every change has a process of assessment that takes  
8 time. In a setting in which resources are scarce,  
9 the time needed to effect change takes longer.  
10 Commissioner Loree Sutton did an assessment the first  
11 90 days where she evaluated what was in place,  
12 existing gaps and what needed to be done. The latter  
13 being the greatest and most immediate needs.  
14 Commissioner Sutton has been in the community meeting  
15 with hundreds of VSOs who provide services and  
16 support to our veterans. As a united front, we need  
17 to give the Mayor and MOVA an opportunity to effect  
18 change. The Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs is  
19 making efforts to streamline the process  
20 notwithstanding the lack of resources. Both the  
21 Mayor and the Commissioner have a commitment of  
22 ending veteran homelessness and mental health and  
23 communication and transparency. And I had the honor  
24 of hosting a mental health roundtable at Fountain  
25 House. Veteran services organizations and former VAB

2 members are essential to the success of the services  
3 and support needed by our veteran community.  
4 Appointing new VAB members and reappointing some of  
5 the prior VAB members serves as a strategic way of  
6 looking back while staying present and working  
7 towards new beginnings. After all, there's only one  
8 mission to support all who have served. All  
9 individuals that truly want to support the veteran  
10 community can be--can do so as united as one, making  
11 a difference that matters in the life of those in  
12 need, being part of a solution. I'm sure that the  
13 veterans have decided to take their life today are  
14 not concerned with who is on the VAB or whether we  
15 have the Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs or the  
16 Department of Veteran Affairs, but rather I wish you  
17 would have supported me. I wish you have been there  
18 for me when I needed you most. Let's not lose sight  
19 of our intentions when we first started the path of  
20 service. Service means to give without expecting  
21 anything in return. Service means to support another  
22 human being without concern as to who gets the credit  
23 [bell]. Service is what we did when we said we would  
24 sacrifice our lives in order to save the lives of

2 others even when it meant it didn't know--we didn't  
3 know whose life we were saving.

4 I've been working with different  
5 constituents for the past three years to replicate  
6 the model Fountain House, which is a community mental  
7 health on 47th Street, and we want to replicate the  
8 model of what we have there. We believe at Fountain  
9 House that emotional wellness dictates our present  
10 state of mind and the community and camaraderie  
11 supportive relationships is the essence and the core  
12 of what helps an individual move forward and stay  
13 present and stay focused or be stagnated. We have a  
14 500-acre farm in New Jersey. We have a standalone  
15 art gallery where we--I have set shows and we have  
16 sold artwork of the veterans. I am and I remain  
17 personally as a veteran and as an HR professional to  
18 assist veterans in their pursuit of seeking  
19 employment whatever that may be, and the pursuit of  
20 mental wellness. Like me, there are hundreds of  
21 veterans who continue to serve at no cost to  
22 veterans. This is an invaluable resource, which we  
23 can all avail ourselves of and get involved with and  
24 be a part of. And I am willing to do anything,  
25 whatever it takes, but I am part of the solution--and



2 can be part of the solution. So you can count on me  
3 whatever is needed. Okay, and I want to read that  
4 bill--

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Thank  
6 you.

7 JENNIFER RIVER: --and make some comments  
8 on the bill.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Please do. Thank  
10 you, ma'am. Thank you all for your testimony. This  
11 concludes today's hearing. Thank you.

12 [gavel]

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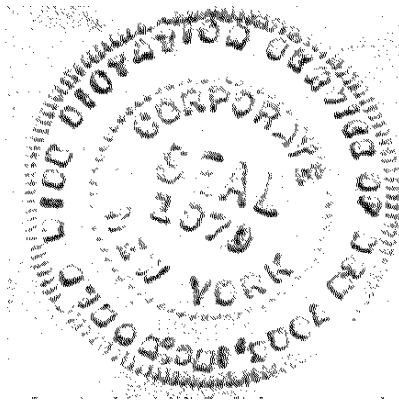
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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 May 20, 2015