



Testimony of Loree Sutton, M.D., Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Retired
Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs
Before the New York City Council Committee on Veterans concerning

Oversight - Int. No. 600 - In Relation To Requiring The Reporting Of Veterans Receiving Agency Services, Int. No. 611 - In Relation To Membership Of The Veterans Advisory Board, Int. No. 619 - In Relation To Meetings Of The Veterans Advisory Board.

**1:00 pm, Tuesday, February 10, 2015
250 Broadway, 16th Floor Committee Room**

Good morning Chairman Ulrich and the members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton, and I serve as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs. I appreciate your leadership and look forward to sharing my perspective about today's topics: Introduction Number 600 - In Relation to Requiring the Reporting Of Veterans Receiving Agency Services; Introduction Number 611 - In Relation to Membership of the Veterans Advisory Board; and, lastly, Introduction Number 619 - In Relation to Meetings of the Veterans Advisory Board.

I'll start by discussing Introduction Numbers 611 and 619, specifically pertaining to the Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB). Since its initial charter in 1987 under Local Law 53, the VAB's role has become increasingly defined, as recognized by periodic updates in 2002 to increase its membership from five to nine members; and in 2006, when leadership structure, meeting frequency, and annual reporting requirements were adopted.

The first VAB Chairman, General Richard Colt (Commanding General of the 77th Regional Readiness Command) was elected in 2007; Vince McGowan succeeded General Colt in 2008 and continues to serve in this position, providing a strong voice and seasoned judgment on all issues affecting NYC veterans. A former Marine Vietnam combat veteran and Vice County Commander, New York County American Legion, Mr. McGowan founded the United War Veterans Council (UWVC) in 1986 and, the following year, assumed responsibility for the NYC Veterans' Day Parade which by 2014, featuring nearly 300 groups and 24,000 participants, is now the nation's largest.

As MOVA Commissioner, I regularly consult with Mr. McGowan and have appreciated each of the VAB members' expertise and recommendations on a variety of key issues concerning NYC veterans and their families. For example, my initial meeting with Mr. McGowan turned into a

two hour riveting account encompassing the history of NYC veterans -- starting from the formation of the 77th Infantry Division at Fort Totten in 1917 and the subsequent post-World War I 'Victory Parade' honoring General John J. Pershing in 1919 (planning for the 100th anniversary in 2019 is already in the works); to later events during the 1980's following the return of Vietnam veterans rightly demanding more representation and better treatment from City Hall; and, up until the present, chronicling post 9/11 historical events and veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. This initial journey through history launched a productive working partnership that has continued, resulting in myriad productive discussions addressing such issues as veteran homelessness, business ownership opportunities and predatory lending practices.

Thus, I greatly value the VAB's repository of wisdom and experience, all of which continues to inform my perspective as MOVA Commissioner. The VAB 2014 annual report and meeting minutes are publically available and provide details of its actions and deliberations over the past year. I am especially grateful to the current VAB for its willingness to continue serving in place through this transition period as a new group of VAB members is selected by the Mayor and Speaker. To preserve continuity and institutional knowledge, the VAB voted to approve the Chairman and Vice-Chairman remaining as nonvoting ex-officio participants for a one-year term. This will go a long way towards ensuring a strong and vibrant future VAB with enduring importance to MOVA's mission.

Introduction Number 611 proposes two changes to the VAB: 1) to add two additional members, for a total of eleven members (six appointed by the Mayor and five by the Speaker); and 2) to create individual electronic mail addresses that would be publically available and designated exclusively for work related to the VAB. These changes would increase the level of community representation and inclusion informing VAB deliberations as well as to make VAB members more accessible to the veteran community. The only change that I would offer is to grant a period of 90 days for MOVA to implement the email provision.

Introduction Number 619 proposes that the VAB convene at least one public meeting in each of the boroughs on an annual basis (minimum of five meetings per year); MOVA would provide at least one week of advance notice and distribute this information to veteran organizations throughout the city. Enhancing public engagement with VAB members and access to VAB meetings are important measures that will strengthen the VAB's role, credibility, outreach and impact. Increased representation, engagement, transparency and accountability will reinforce essential bonds of trust and collegiality upon which effective consultation, collaboration, coordination and negotiation depends. I look forward to implementing these changes as the VAB starts its new chapter of service, building on the foundation of its past and leaning forward to engage the strengths and needs of current and future NYC veterans and their families.

Following the Committee hearing on the VAB last fall, MOVA has been contacted by many qualified individuals who expressed interest in being considered for membership. In keeping with the Mayor's core values and strategic vision, the new VAB promises to represent a diverse range of relevant domains and life experiences, including the public, private and social profit sectors, spanning academia, business, arts, health and entrepreneurship. New members will also be selected based upon consideration of services in different conflicts. MOVA has forwarded recommendations to the Mayor.

Introduction Number 600 is another important legislative proposal, requiring systematic annual reporting of veterans receiving City agency services with respect to Mitchell-Lama housing applications; food vending permits; general vending licenses; and utilization of HUD-VASH vouchers. Permanent housing and career employment opportunities are vital to the health and wellbeing of our veterans and their families. We look forward to working with you to identify metrics that best reflect services and benefits provided to veterans. This data will provide a useful overview that will inform our actions as well as provide insights for other organizations whose services, support and advocacy encompass these domains.

We recognize the need to improve tools for identifying veterans and tracking needs, services, and outcomes. To this end, MOVA is working with other City agencies to assess current service delivery models, engagement strategies, community outreach programs as well as methods for recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans to determine how best practices can be effectively adopted. Leading this effort is the work already well underway to end veteran homelessness.

As Mayor de Blasio boldly pledged in last week's State of the City address, we will ensure that no veterans are living in the streets and that all veterans have access to permanent housing by the end of 2015. This moral obligation to serve those who have served us requires the commitment and creativity of all of us who so proudly claim New York City as our home town.—City leaders, real estate developers, service providers, community advocates, fellow veterans and citizens alike must step up to this challenge. And we will. Failure is not an option.

In October 2014, as a first step toward the Initiative, New York City signed onto the Obama administration's Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in 2015. Today we have 1,000 homeless veterans in our City. Under the Challenge, we are working to ensure that there are no homeless veterans left to sleep on our streets and that every Veteran sheltered by the City or the VA has an opportunity to move to permanent housing within 90 days. (Some may have refused to move, but adequate housing resources are in place.) We also will have programs in place (such as protections for veterans at risk of eviction) to prevent homelessness among our veterans in the future.

With guidance from HUD, the VA and advocates for veterans and the homeless, the NYC Continuum of Care Veterans Task Force and the City will finalize the work of determining the housing needs of every homeless veteran. Working with advocates, owners of subsidized, supportive, and market rate housing, and the City Council, the City will enact and enforce veterans' preferences in existing subsidized and public housing, and prioritize veterans for a range of housing resources, including HUD-VASH vouchers, LINC, and placements in City-financed housing units, including supportive housing. With the real estate industry, the City will encourage landlords to house our veterans with the assistance of these rental subsidy resources and services. Intensive case management and support services vital to the success of these programs and are tailored to meet the individual needs of veterans and their families.

With additional SSVF funding from the VA, the City worked closely with grantees to develop an initiative at the 30th Street Intake Center to rapidly re-house new and returning veterans who might otherwise enter the shelter system. The program began operating just last month (January 2015).

The Initiative will require outreach through the media, as well as veterans' groups and other groups to which veterans turn, to widely publicize the resources being brought to bear by the City and HUD. Outreach to landlords and real estate organizations also will be necessary to help landlords understand the programs and to publicize positive outcomes related to their efforts.

The City will also work with the Continuum of Care and Veterans' Task Force to create a centrally managed coordinated assessment and housing placement system for assessing and prioritizing veterans' needs; organizing and identifying available resources such as apartments with veterans' preferences; placing tenants in available units; comparing outcomes of different efforts; assuring access to case management and support services; and tracking long-term retention and functional outcomes of the veterans placed in permanent housing. This system could then be brought to scale to alleviate the larger problem of chronic homelessness in NYC.

Housing resources available for veterans include preventive resources through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program and rental assistance in the form of VASH vouchers from the VA (already strictly for veterans); LINC (this is new) and Section 8 (existing) from the City; plus available City-subsidized affordable housing units including supportive housing for the most vulnerable veterans. We will need landlords to make units available for veterans with these rental subsidies. The Task Force will create a housing plan for every veteran in shelter by the end of February 2015.

Implementation of this initiative has already begun through the work of the Veterans Task Force. Milestones will primarily include the results of regular tracking, review of the utilization of targeted housing resources and the effect on the veteran point-in-time homeless count. The ultimate milestone to be reached through continual decrease in the number of homeless Veterans is the end of Veteran homelessness in New York City evidenced in the 2016 HOPE Count.

NYC's strategy is consistent with best national practices, with a relentless focus on removing barriers to permanent housing; prioritizing chronically homeless veterans with HUD-VASH/supportive housing options; coordinating outreach efforts to locate, identify and engage homeless veterans; targeting rapid re-housing interventions such as the VA SSVF program; leveraging local housing and services for VA-ineligible veterans; increasing early detection and access to preventive services to keep vulnerable veterans and families housed; and closely monitoring progress towards the goal of ending veteran homelessness; sustaining gains; and applying lessons learned with veterans to the larger homeless population.

Clearly, our commitment to ending veteran homelessness comprises an essential component of MOVA's strategy during this next year. Other strategic lines of effort include working with the First Lady to provide a mental health roadmap for all New Yorkers, including veterans and their families, through a public health approach empowering individuals and championing community-based services that enhance social support; dignity and independence. MOVA will also assume a vital coordination role to ensure that NYC veterans and their families are connected to quality public, private and community social profit services.

We will further our work with SBS and other partners to fulfill the action recommendations aimed at building increased capacity for assisting veteran business owners in a variety of domains -- networking, mentoring, training, engagement, outreach and leadership -- to start and grow their own businesses as well as to pursue other career employment opportunities. Finally, we seek to attract and engage returning veterans and their families to choose the City of New York as an ideal community in which they can study, work, live, serve and thrive.

During the first three months of my tenure as MOVA Commissioner, I engaged in over 200 public events throughout the five boroughs, getting a chance to connect with and listen to a diverse range of key stakeholders. This experience proved to be invaluable, underscoring the enormous passion, care and concern of the greater NYC veteran community. Commencing this endeavor with an open mind, eager to share ideas, pose questions, understand perspectives and build social capital and trust, I remain thankful to all who assisted, invited, hosted or contacted me along the way. Yet, for all of the activity during this blitz period, I am heartened to know that our interaction will continue, deepen and build upon this foundation.

Further, let me take a moment to reinforce a truth known to me from the very beginning of my MOVA journey . . . that I am one in a long series of MOVA leaders who have put the needs of NYC veterans and their families first. From ensuring indigent deceased veterans are buried with dignity; to counseling and connecting myriad veterans to services and benefits; to intervening to prevent wrongful evictions, power shut-offs, and countless other near calamities that come to our attention; to engaging women veteran leaders as an overlooked resource; to representing the Mayor at public events and honoring veterans at every opportunity, MOVA's door has long been open and always will be.

And now, charged to execute MOVA's strategy in alignment with Mayor de Blasio's guiding vision, I am energized and optimistic about the way ahead. Yes, there is much work to be done, starting with the imperative to make the best use of what we have, paving the way for MOVA to advocate, educate, engage, collaborate and coordinate for the greater good going forward. As you put it, Mr. Chairman, there is always more we can do . . . Our shared sense of urgency -- even impatience -- is perhaps our greatest ally. Moving forward, we will continue to work together, find common ground, disagree without being disagreeable and make lasting changes on behalf of NYC veterans and their families. There simply is no greater privilege.

Thank you for this opportunity to meet with you today. As always, I look forward to continuing our journey together on behalf of all New York City veterans and their loved ones. At this time, I welcome any questions during the Q/A discussion period. Again, thank you for your leadership.

Statement of Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America
before the
New York City Council Committee on Veterans
for the hearing on
Veteran Advisory Board

February 10, 2015

Chairman Ulrich and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), I would like to extend our gratitude for being given the opportunity to share with you our views and recommendations regarding the New York City Veteran Advisory Board (VAB) and the three proposed pieces of legislation before this committee. Serving our veteran in New York City is a top priority of IAVA and the VAB and these proposed changes to it are critically important to the lives of the veterans in this city.

With over 200,000 veterans estimated to be living in New York City, 3,500 of those are IAVA members, the role of city government, including the Veterans Advisory Board, is crucial to the implementation and development of benefits and services that will directly improve the lives of veterans and their families. The introduced City Council legislation (600, 611 and 619) address the many issues that have been brought to this committee over the years. We applaud the work of this committee to move these issues into legislation.

We are encouraged that this legislation will bring the VAB closer to the veterans that it serves. Having VAB meetings held in every borough will bring the members into the communities that they are representing and face to face with the veterans they represent. Additionally, having these meetings open to the public and recorded will increase the level of transparency of this advisory board. These steps will hopefully begin to close the gap between the Veteran Advisory Board and veterans in the city, an issue we presented in our testimony on October 27, 2014.

The expansion of the VAB that this legislation would mandate is much needed. This advisory board is still missing the chance to engage a number of populations in NYC including the sizable student population. IAVA would like to see, if this legislation were to pass, the addition of a student veteran to this advisory board.

Despite the overall positive nature of these three pieces of legislation, there are still challenges that the VAB faces. Namely, many of the members' terms of the board have lapsed with no reappointment. We would urge the Mayor and Speaker to appoint new members, or reappoint existing members, expeditiously. Having these seats effectively sit empty gives the appearance that this board is not important to the city of New York. We hope that after passing this legislation the attention will be turned to ensuring that this board is properly filled and active.

There is still a great deal of work that needs to get done in the city and having an effective Veteran Advisory Board is critical in ensuring that work is done successfully. We look forward to addressing future issues with this committee, including veteran treatment courts later this month.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to offer our views on this important issue and we look forward to continuing our work with each of you, your staff, and this committee to improve the lives of veterans and their families in New York City.

Thank you for your time and attention.

NYC Veterans Alliance

www.nycveteransalliance.org

Testimony by Kristen L. Rouse
Interim Director, NYC Veterans Alliance Working Group

Hearing on Reform of the Veterans Advisory Board
and Reporting of Veterans Receiving Agency Services
Int. Nos. 611, 619 & 600

NYC Council Committee on Veterans
Honorable Eric Ulrich, Chair

February 10, 2015

Ints. 611 & 619

My name is Kristen L. Rouse, and I represent a newly formed grassroots organization called the **NYC Veterans Alliance**. I am a veteran of the United States Army, and I served in Afghanistan in 2006, 2010, and 2012, for a total of 31 months deployed. I personally believe New York City is the greatest City in the world, and there's no place I've been prouder or happier to come home to than here. It's been clear to me that New Yorkers truly appreciate military veterans, but our City's government still has a long way to go before we can claim that NYC is truly a veteran-friendly City.

One key area we need to improve upon is ensuring that the voices of **all** veterans—from the distinguished veterans who served us in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, to the forgotten veterans who stood at guardposts across the globe during the Cold War, to those who served in Panama, Mogadishu, Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and Bosnia, to the men and women like me recently coming home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—and even those left behind, left out, or underserved by bureaucratic snafus and inadequate support when they came home. All of these voices, needs, challenges, and blueprints for success must be present in the conversations NYC government is having about its veterans. These hearings have been important in this process, and we commend Council Member Ulrich and the Veterans Committee for these vital public discussions and the legislation we hope will result.

Earlier this month, the NYC Veterans Alliance, in partnership with NY MetroVets, launched a survey asking the NYC veterans community to rate their policy priorities. Among other issues, we asked respondents to prioritize the reform of the Veterans Advisory Board. The survey is open through the end of February, and we still have responses coming in. Yet even with these preliminary results, responses thus far from our community have overwhelmingly favored reform:

- Out of 290 respondents, **60%** say reforming the VAB is “essential.” Another **28%** say reform is “very important,” and **9%** say it is “moderately important.”

- This equates to **97% of respondents thus far saying that VAB reform is important to them.**

We fully support proposals to increase the number of appointees to the VAB and make appointee contact information, meeting information, and proceedings open to the veterans community. We believe these measures have the potential to make the VAB a more transparent, effective, and representative body serving the veterans of NYC. We urge the City Council to take prompt action on these important reforms, and we offer these additional recommendations:

- VAB meetings should be accessible to veterans who reside across the City. Meetings should be planned for all five boroughs and community attendance should be maximized.
- VAB appointees should not only abide by their terms of appointment, but also be actively engaged in the local veterans community.
- VAB appointees should be more fully representative of NYC's diverse veteran population, and inclusive of the men and women who served across the spectrum of conflicts—including Afghanistan—as well as from different branches of the military, representing both enlisted and officer experiences, as well as diverse areas of engagement within NYC's veterans community.
- The VAB should produce and make public an annual report of its role in advising the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA), to include summaries of issues raised, recommended actions, inputs from the veterans community at meetings, and itemized accounting for any City funds used by the VAB.

Int. 600

We have the largest city government in the country, and we have the one of the largest urban populations of veterans in the U.S. Yet to date there has been no coherent tracking, reporting, or coordination of the services NYC government is delivering to its veterans. We fully support the intent of Int. 600, and recommend two changes:

- First, wording should include **all** City agencies that may be offering services to veterans. Limiting reporting to services related only to housing, vending licenses, and HRA-run employment may create a piecemeal approach to City agencies reporting services to veterans, inadvertently exclude other agencies or services (such as those provided by DOHMH and HHC), or otherwise not fully capture data on veterans receiving services.
- Second, the definition of veteran should be changed to **“any individual who has served in the military, regardless of discharge status.”** All men and women who answered the call of service to our nation should first be assumed to be veterans—and then eligibility for services should be determined thereafter. Including data on City services offered to veterans not having an honorable discharge would offer critical data on veterans who have been under-served or otherwise left behind by the system.

It must be noted here that many discharges characterized as “other than honorable” or “dishonorable” were the result of minor offenses related to PTSD or other effects of military service that were either misunderstood or mistreated at the time. Many of those discharged for homosexuality prior to the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” still retain an adverse status. The process for upgrading the character of a discharge can be long and problematic, and while discharge status is key to eligibility for VA benefits, discharge status **should not** be a determining factor for tracking of services provided to veterans by NYC agencies.

Our survey has shown overwhelming support thus far for all NYC agencies providing services to veterans to track and report the number of veterans receiving those services: **61%** of respondents say this is “essential,” another **25%** call this “very important,” and **12%** call it “moderately important”—for a total of **98% of respondents indicating that this issue is important to them.** We urge the City Council to take prompt action accordingly.

On behalf of the NYC Veterans Alliance, I thank you for this opportunity to speak today. Pending your questions, this concludes my testimony.



Tuesday, February 10th, 2015

Written testimony respectfully submitted to NYC Committee on Veterans, by Avi Leshes, Director of Neighborhood Business Services, and Staff Liaison for Veterans Business Council at the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce.

Hon. Eric A. Ulrich, Chair, NYC Committee on Veterans

Good Afternoon Chair Ulrich; councilmembers Cabrera, Cohen, Maisel, and Vallone; members of the NYC Committee on Veterans; and guests.

My name is Avi Leshes and I serve as the Director of Neighborhood Business Services and Staff Liaison for the Veterans Business Council at the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce (BCC). I am delivering testimony on behalf of Carlo A. Scissura, Esq., President and CEO of the BCC.

BCC is a membership-based business assistance organization, which represents the interests of over 2,000 member businesses, as well as other businesses across the borough of Brooklyn. The Brooklyn Alliance is the not-for-profit economic development organization of the Chamber, which works to address the needs of businesses through direct business assistance programs.

We applaud this committee for convening today's hearing to address supporting Veterans. Specifically, I will be delivering testimony in relation to Intro No. 611.

In 2014, BCC started a much-needed discussion on veterans needs with the launch of the Brooklyn Chamber Veterans Council. The goal of the council is to create a business and job searching support system that can help make sure veterans get the services they need to grow economically. The core group of participants include representatives from the office of the Brooklyn Borough President; veteran groups such as Operation Wellness Warrior, David Lynch Foundation, Hope for the Warriors, and Team Hevo; and Brooklyn Bridge Rotary Club and Small Business Services.

More specifically, the council has been focusing on building a platform where veterans can go for assistance pertaining to starting or expanding a business; job placement and career development; working with elected officials to pass legislation that will create procurement opportunities with the city for veteran-owned businesses; free legal assistance and business advice; and making referrals to mental health specialists and programs.

Veteran entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for New Yorkers to contribute directly to the economic development of their communities, by increasing revenue and hiring both civilians and other veterans.

Upon review of 611, the Chamber would like to recommend that the Veteran Advisory Board be expanded to include someone who either currently owns or has owned a business, or has a business background. The Chamber feels that it is important that the Veterans Advisory Board be able to not only advise our elected officials on the needs of the veteran community, but to advise on the issues facing veteran business owners while also providing assistance to those who need it.

Additionally, the Chamber would like to suggest including a veteran spouse/domestic partner to the advisory board as well. In doing so, the Advisory Board will be able to respond to and receive the necessary input from



Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce

veteran families, but specifically from spouses/domestic partners who are silent hero's that shoulder the responsibility of being a caregiver, provider and parent. It is important that the Veteran Advisory Board help address some of the challenges faced by veteran families, specifically the spouse/domestic partner of a veteran.

Strengthening the functionality of the Veterans Advisory Board, and adding members with varied backgrounds, including business owners and spouses/domestic partners will ensure that the needs of all veterans are being adequately met.

Thank you again to the NYC Committee on Veteran Affairs for facilitating today's hearing.

CAS/mc/al



**New York City Council Hearing
Committee on Veterans**

Tuesday, February 10, 1:00 p.m.

Testimony re: Int. No. 600 - In relation to requiring the reporting of veterans receiving agency services.

Good afternoon. My name is Peter Kempner. I am the Coordinator of Veterans Litigation and a Senior Staff Attorney with the Veterans Justice Project (VJP) at Legal Services NYC. Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the nation with offices in all five boroughs where we serve over 60,000 New Yorkers annually.

The Veterans Justice Project represents low-income veterans, active duty service members and their families who are in need of civil legal services in the areas of housing law, public benefit eligibility, employment law and with other essential needs. Our attorneys and paralegals answer calls on our city wide legal hotline for veterans and staff multiple legal clinics at VA facilities throughout the city. Since launching this project just four years ago, we served or represented over 4,000 New York City veterans, active duty service members and their families.

When the Veterans Justice Project was formed four years ago, Legal Services NYC did not ask our clients whether or not they were veterans and we did not track the number of veterans we served. We then made the decision to ask every client seeking our services in every office and in every program, veteran focused or not, if they or any of member of their household had served in the armed forces. Asking this question has allowed us to focus resources on veterans and their families and ensure that our veteran clients found their way to practitioners who understand their benefits and who are able to set them up with the proper resources to assist them.

The lack of data being collected and reported on services being provided to New York City's veteran community by New York City Agencies has greatly affected the ability of veteran service organizations, such as Legal Services NYC and government agencies to address the most pressing needs of our city's veterans. City agencies need better data collection on veterans and their needs to adequately respond to the challenges faced by veterans. Inquiring into and reporting the number of veterans accessing various services from city agencies not only serves the purpose of specifically directing services at veterans, but may also serve a second and equally important purpose of oversight by the City Council and community based organizations.

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For instance, we do not know how many veterans are applying for one shot grants at the New York City Human Resources Administration ("HRA") because these numbers are not reported by HRA. Certainly, knowing this information will allow organizations such as Legal Services NYC to target our eviction prevention resources to the veterans who need our services the most. It would also allow providers contracted through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' ("VA") Supportive Services for Veterans Families program to target their resources better as well. Having such data can benefit HRA too. If the agency encounters a veteran seeking assistance, its staff will then know where in the community the veteran can get help. Similarly, if there is data on how many veterans are receiving ongoing cash assistance benefits and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, HRA can analyze whether the veteran may be eligible for benefits provided through the VA. This would not only help the veteran by connecting them to more generous federal assistance, but would also be advantageous to the city by shifting veterans off the City's welfare rolls and onto federal benefits.

New York State has an absolutely amazing system of veterans' preferences which date back to the late 1800s when veterans returned home to New York from fighting in the Civil War. The state successfully uses veterans' preferences in many unique and effective ways by granting preferences to veterans to obtain vending licenses, civil service credits, and spots in Mitchell-Lama housing. However, there is still a lot of information that we do not know about veterans preferences. For instance, I often speak to veterans who face problems with their vending licenses ranging from suspensions to fines and other issues. How many veterans face these issues? And how many veterans are actually granted vending licenses by the Department of Consumer Affairs ("DCA")? We do not know because DCA does not report this data. Better data and better reporting will allow those of us in the veterans' services community to identify veteran vendors who may be in need of assistance with the process and with legal issues they may face.

We have found that veterans' preferences are not always properly implemented by the governmental agencies tasked with that implementation. In a June 6, 2012, report issued by the New York State Comptroller's office it was determined that very few veterans were benefiting from the Mitchell-Lama veterans preference due to inaction and/or disregard of the preference by housing companies and lax enforcement by the oversight agency, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development ("HPD"). While the Comptroller's report has resulted in better oversight and compliance with the Mitchell-Lama veterans' preference, our office has still been involved in multiple instances of litigation seeking to enforce the preference for individual veterans. Without better data and reporting we have no idea how widespread these problems are and will not be able to address them in a more systemic fashion.

Int. 600 brings to mind a quote from the late United States Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis who said "Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants." We thank the Committee and the Counsel for seeking to take steps which will ensure that services and programs intended to benefit veterans are delivered in the most effective manner possible.

Peter Kempner
Coordinator of Veterans Litigation and a Senior Staff Attorney
Veterans Justice Project, Legal Services NYC

Written Submission to the Council Veterans Committee
Amanda M. Spray, PhD

Chairman Ulrich and members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting testimony from our organization today at the Council Veterans Committee hearing on veterans services in New York City. I am Dr. Amanda Spray, Psychologist and Liaison to the VA Medical Center at the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic at NYU Langone Medical Center. I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the leadership and staff of the Military Family Clinic related to Int. No. 600. Since the Military Family Clinic was founded in July 2012, the Clinic has established itself as a trusted and respected source of integrated, flexible, evidence-based treatment for military families, serving over 372 families since that time. We have built strong and successful partnerships with a large number of veteran and community organizations in New York State, establishing a reliable system of referrals and collaboration.

The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Military Family Clinic at NYU Langone Medical Center was founded to provide high quality treatment accessible to veterans, active duty service members, and their families. The Clinic is committed to removing any barriers to treatment and welcomes all military personnel regardless of their discharge status, time of service, and deployment experience. Family is defined broadly to include any member of the family impacted by the veteran's service including extended family and partners regardless of their marital status.

We are dedicated to ensuring high quality care to veterans both in our clinic and in the wider NYC community. To better assess, understand, and track service utilization by veterans in the NYC area and to promote cohesiveness and accountability of the agencies offering services to the veterans, it is important to develop a consistent system of evaluation and reporting. Although some elements of such system may be service-specific (e.g., housing, employment, mental health), a core number of variables should remain consistent and be reported by all agencies. We propose the following core variables to be assessed and reported routinely:

- Demographic Variables
 - a. Age and Ethnicity
 - b. Employment Status and Annual income
 - c. Housing Status
 - d. Family and Marital Status
 - e. Military History and Discharge Status
- Outcome of service provided
- Satisfaction of veteran measure

These core variables should be reported quarterly in order to best assess the scope, reach, and need for services. Routine assessment is essential to ensure our veterans are obtaining the services that they deserve and need. It is imperative that enrollment numbers not be the only metric by which veteran service providers are measured. It is essential to assess and report the success of the service delivered. This will vary by type of service provider but can often be captured by administration of a quality of life measure. Additionally, the satisfaction of the veteran, the customer of the service provided, should be assessed. Data on all veterans, not just those who received an honorable discharge, should be reported on to provide the most accurate information to funding agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony on this important issue.

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

Eric A. Ulrich, Chair

Int 0600-2014 A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring the reporting of veterans receiving agency services.

Int 0611-2015A Local Law to amend the New York City charter, in relation to membership of the veterans advisory board.

Int 0619-2015 A Local Law to amend the New York City charter, in relation to meetings of the veterans advisory board.

Testimony by Coco Culhane, Esq.
Director, Veteran Advocacy Project
Urban Justice Center

February 10, 2015

Good afternoon members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Coco Culhane and I am the director of the Veteran Advocacy Project at the Urban Justice Center. We provide free legal services to low-income veterans with a focus on those living with Post-Traumatic Stress, traumatic brain injury, and substance abuse problems. Thank you for the invitation to testify about the proposed changes to the New York City charter and administrative code.

The Veteran Advocacy Project fully supports the proposed expansion of the Veterans' Advisory Board and its existence as an entity open to the public. Giving members city email accounts, publishing notice of the meetings, and allowing the public to attend will give the veterans of New York City a greater opportunity to be heard and for their ideas to make an impact. Too often civilians are telling veterans what is best for them or creating programs for veterans without any actual input from the community to be served—I say this as a civilian myself. Opening the door for further communication and interaction with the advisory board is an excellent first step in reshaping the city's commitment to our servicemembers.

I would also like to commend the council members on introducing Public Law No. 600, requiring the reporting of the number of veterans receiving certain city services. It has been a shameful situation that so many heads of city agencies have come before this committee over the years and been unable to provide any information on veterans accessing the programs in their respective departments.

Tracking the number of veterans using some New York City's most essential programs will provide invaluable data for the city and for the organizations that conduct outreach to and services for the population. However, there is a huge opportunity potentially being overlooked when it comes to this data. As chapter 1, title 3 section 3-116, subsection 10 reads in the proposed law it excludes a substantial population of veterans, many of whom need city services more than their counterparts, because they are cut off from VA benefits and care by bad discharges. The definition of veteran in this bill matches the language the VA uses for eligibility. Is that what the city wants to track? For what purpose?

There is a unique opportunity here to have city agencies, particularly the Human Resources Administration, present a full picture of which veterans need their assistance. Veterans with bad discharges face enormous barriers to employment and cannot access the VA, and are therefore

more likely to need the entitlements that HRA administers. Veterans with Bad Conduct Discharges (BCD) or Dishonorable Discharges cannot access VA health care, are not entitled to VA Pensions, and only rarely will a veteran with a BCD have successfully petitioned the VA for disability compensation. Many federal programs for veterans, including those not administered by the VA but funded by it, use eligibility for health care as the standard for receiving services.¹ This means that veterans with the three lowest discharge statuses are usually ineligible for assistance. And it is far more common than not that these veterans will be referred to as having “dishonorable discharges” due to a general lack of public knowledge about discharge status.

For example, one of my clients is a man who served honorably in Vietnam, watched his best friend skewered by bamboo spikes, and spent several mornings picking up the body parts of the men he fought with the night before. When he returned to the States he requested leave because his mother was sick. He was denied and went AWOL. Eventually he was discharged with Other Than Honorable status. He has been told that he has a dishonorable discharge so many times, that he now says it himself. We just won his appeal for a positive character of discharge determination from the VA, but that is only one step in fixing his records. And for the last forty years he has relied on city services as he struggled with severe Post Traumatic Stress and other disabilities. It is very likely he will not be counted as this law is written.

Beyond the false dichotomy of honorable versus dishonorable, agencies will surely run into problems with what constitutes “active military service.” Many Reservists and National Guard members believe they have active service because they have active duty for training (ADT) time, only to be told by various federal agencies that they are not in fact “veterans”—a deeply wounding statement to many who volunteered. Depending on how data collection is conducted, these veterans will likely be counted by the City, because they served honorably, even if not activated by federal order. Yet many others with even more service time will not. If the City is

¹ For example, HUD-VASH vouchers, which provide what is essentially Section 8 housing along with case management services, requires a veteran to be eligible for VA healthcare. While this is defined as a veteran with an other than dishonorable discharge, veterans with Bad Conduct Discharges are categorically denied healthcare even for service-connected injuries by 38 C.F.R. 3.360(b); and veterans with an Other Than Honorable discharge can request a character of discharge determination to be made under the guidance of 38 CFR § 3.12. Similarly, veterans who apply for housing arrears assistance with one of the seven Supportive Services for Veterans’ Families (SSVF) grantees in New York City will need to provide a DD214 that displays an Honorable or General discharge. If the veteran has an Other Than Honorable discharge, program administrators turn to the local VAMCs to run what is called a “HINQ” (hospital inquiry), which displays the veteran’s status for healthcare treatment.

going to require this reporting, we should do it right. First, the exact purpose of tracking should be clear and then the challenge is how to ask the question to get that data.

City agencies should be given guidance so that they can properly survey New Yorkers accessing safety net services. There are veterans who suffer from the shame of bad paper and will not self-identify, but New York City has the chance to count some of these men and women. Numbers for bad paper are hard to come by. Some estimates put the rate at one in ten veterans. That means that approximately 25,000 veterans in New York City are living with bad paper. During the Vietnam era 560,000 veterans were given less than honorable discharges.² A FOIA request conducted in 2012 revealed that since 2006, more than 76,000 servicemembers nationally had been given bad discharge papers.³ In the Army, the 25 percent increase in misconduct discharges mirrors the rise of wounded soldiers.⁴ We need to be counting these New Yorkers so that we can better address their needs. When someone is sentenced for, let's say, a drug offense and comes back from prison to New York City, we don't stop counting them as a New Yorker. We provide re-entry services, public benefits if needed, assistance in finding employment, and more.

If the goal is to track the total number of veterans accessing city services then the law should be written to include *all* veterans. And the agencies should phrase the question as, "Have you ever served in the military?" A follow up question on type of service and discharge could be mandated. This city should not overlook the extremely important data it could capture with the passage of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

² Clodfelter, Michael, *Vietnam in Military Statistics*, p. 248 (Jefferson N.C., 1995).

³ Philips, Dave, "Other Than Honorable," *Colorado Springs Gazette*, May 19, 2013.

⁴ *Id.*

New York City Council Meeting Veterans Affairs Committee February 10, 2015

RE: Reform Veterans Advisory Board

Greetings: To All, etc..

My name is Armando Crescenzi, I am a Disabled Veteran. I work as a Mobile Food Cart Vendor and before that a general Vendor.

Over the last 10 years I have been devastated by the injustice directed against Disabled Veterans (DAV) at the hands of the City. Specifically, Harassment on the Street by The Police, Real Estate and BIDS, Store Owners and Community Boards. More egregious is the injustice against DAV's at the hands of NYC Agencies, i.e. Parks, DCA, DOH and ECB.

Together with other DAV's, I have founded Veterans First of NYC. As a Nonprofit organization, we assist DAV's with Street Vending issues. Much of our time is spent defending erroneous violations against DAVs.

Veterans First of NYC has been bringing Veterans issues to elected officials and Veterans organizations at the City State and Local Level.

Surprisingly, I was not aware that a Veterans Advisory Board existed, nor was I aware that each Agency in NYC has an appointed Veterans Liaison.

Veterans First supports the proposal to reform the VAB, under the direction of MOVA. We further propose an expanded role for the VAB and the each of the City Agency Liaisons.

A proactive and responsive VAB interaction with Agency Liaisons could alleviate many of the problems which DAVs face at the hands of the City Agencies. Complaints and violations are a daily occurrence. These issues must be addressed on a daily basis as they arise.

With an active VAB New York City can become a City where Veterans are appreciated for their service and sacrifice.

We look forward to working with the VAB, the MOVA, and all city agencies.

Thank you,

Armando Crescenzi,

Veterans First, Ltd. of New York City

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Wincy M Gowda (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Veterans Advisory Bd

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: BEN SIMMONS (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 133 BRICELLE, S INY

I represent: DISABLED VETERANS LEGALLY LICENSED TO VEND.

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Jasa Anshuman (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 292 Madison Ave New York NY

I represent: Irak and Afghanistan Vets at America

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 600 617 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: Fel 10, 2015

Name: Armando Armando A. Crescenzi
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 2335 Yates Ave

I represent: Brox NY 10469

Address: Vetome Kist

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Peter Kemper
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 105 COURT ST. BROOKLYN NY 11218

I represent: LEGAL SERVICES NYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: AVI LESHES
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: BROOKLYN CHAMBER

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 600, 611, 619 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2-18-15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: COCO CULHANE

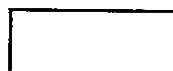
Address: 40 RECTOR ST.

I represent: VETERAN ADVOCACY, URBAN JUSTICE

Address: 40 Recto~~r~~ St. NYC 10006

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 600, 611, 619 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10 Feb 2015

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kristen L. Rouse

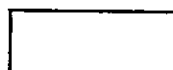
Address: 182 Franklin St #2E Brooklyn 11222

I represent: NYC Veterans Alliance

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1000 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/10/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amanda Spray

Address: 1 Park Ave 8th Fl. NY, NY 10016

I represent: Steven + Alexandra Cohen Military Family

Address: Clinic @ NYU Langone

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 600/611/819 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10 FEB 15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: FANG A. WONG

Address: 138-15 FRANKLIN AVE. FLUSHING, NY

I represent: MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 600, 611/819 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner Loree Suttan (MOVA)

Address: 346 Broadway, NY, NY

I represent: MOVA

Address: 346 Broadway, NY, NY

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆