



Testimony of Loree Sutton, M.D., Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Retired
Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs
New York City Council Committee on Veterans
Oversight – Veterans Advisory Board: Impact of Last Year's Reform

250 Broadway -- Committee Room 14th Floor
1:00 pm, Wednesday, January 13, 2016

Good afternoon, Chairman Ulrich and the members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton and I remain honored as always to serve as the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to meet and address today's topic of evaluating the effectiveness of last year's reforms concerning the Veterans Advisory Board.

Let me start by wishing each of you a Happy New Year -- and thanking you for your stalwart dedication to the wellbeing of NYC veterans and their families . . . Looking back, 2015 was a year of strong collaboration, constructive partnership, substantive legislation and historic achievement for MOVA, briefly summarized below:

Federal validation of NYC benchmark success in effectively ending chronic veteran homelessness

Newly appointed Veteran Advisory Board, strategically selected to ensure a diverse range of service backgrounds, community engagement interests, and professional expertise

First city to add Veteran Designator to the municipal ID card program (IDNYC)

Commitment to invest in veteran mental health as an integral element of ThriveNYC, including support for increased outreach, 311 reforms to connect NYC veterans and family members to the Veteran Crisis Line as well as City resources and services; and holistic services across an integrated community health model of care

Productive working relationship with the City Council, achieving multiple legislative initiatives voted into law, culminating in the bill signing of Local Law 113 on the Intrepid, authorizing the establishment of a separate agency, Department of Veteran Services, to better serve the NYC veteran community

Leadership and collaboration for special events drawing national attention (e.g. Fleet Week/Veterans Week/America's Parade)

Move to newly renovated office space at 1 Centre Street in the historic David N. Dinkins Municipal building, named after the former Mayor, one of the City's most renowned veterans

Initiation of a new City tradition, the Mayor's Flag Ceremony followed by the posting all Service flags at the entrance of City Hall during Veterans' Week

3-fold increase in budget and staffing capacity, a historic investment already yielding increased citywide outreach and impact

Initial planning process commences to ensure a successful transition from MOVA to the Department of Veteran Services (in progress)

Looking ahead, I find it somewhat difficult these days to contain my excitement, knowing that we are embarking upon the next leg of our historic journey on behalf of NYC veterans and their families. I want to thank all who have worked so hard to make our 2015 achievements possible: Mayor Bill de Blasio, Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Chair Eric Ulrich and members of the Committee on Veterans; pioneering leaders of the NYC veteran community, past and present; family members of our military service members and veterans, with special recognition for our Gold Star families; civic leaders and concerned citizens who embrace the moral imperative to serve those who have served us; members of Team MOVA as well so many friends of MOVA serving in City Hall and across the government; the Continuum of Care Veterans Task Force on Ending Veteran Homelessness (co-chaired by VA and City representatives, leading a tireless group of city officials, agency leaders, service providers and advocates) and, lastly, the NYC veterans' advocates, simply the best, whose voices were at last heard and honored, as evidenced by the historic achievements together we have achieved. Please, join me in a round of applause expressing heartfelt gratitude AND relentless commitment to make 2016 the best year ever!

Shifting gears to today's hearing topic, let us take a moment to briefly recap the VAB's history. Since its initial charter in 1987 under Local Law 53, the VAB's role has become increasingly important, as recognized by periodic updates in 2002 to increase its membership; and in 2006, when annual reporting requirements were adopted. The first VAB Chairman, Vince McGowan, was elected in 2008 and remained in this position until April 2015. I am grateful to former Chair McGowan for his willingness to serve as an informal advisor, assisting the new VAB and providing historical continuity and counsel.

In March of 2015, Mayor de Blasio signed Local Laws 24 and 25 to reform the Veterans Advisory Board. Local Law 24 expanded the Board to eleven members and required that each have an email address for Board activity. Local Law 25 requires the Board to meet a minimum of five times per year and to hold at least one meeting in each borough. Additionally the Law requires notice of each public meeting provided in accordance with the public notice requirements of the public officers law, recording/broadcast of each public meeting in accordance with the New York City Charter, and inclusion of VAB policy and legislative recommendations for the Mayor's Office and the City Council in the VAB annual report which is available on the MOVA website.

These are important measures that have already strengthened the VAB's role, credibility, outreach and impact, pointing towards future gains for all concerned. Increased representation, engagement, transparency and accountability will reinforce essential bonds of trust and collegiality upon which effective consultation, collaboration, coordination and negotiation depends. These changes portend a pattern of continued and increasingly positive impact as the VAB engages 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 signing of LL 24 and LL 25, the Mayor and the Speaker announced seven new appointments and two members who were reappointed. In July 2015, the Speaker announced one new member and reappointed one existing VAB member, thus completing the current roster of eleven VAB members (six Mayoral appointees and five Speaker appointees). In August 2015, the VAB elected its new leadership:

Chair: Todd Haskins; Vice Chair: Samuel Innocent; Secretary: Joe Bello.

MOVA has worked throughout the last year to assist the VAB attain full compliance with these requirements. In the first year of the new legislation, the VAB and MOVA initially worked through various logistical challenges such as finding the most appropriate locations which provided access, broadcast capability and convenient access to public transportation routes. Filming of the VAB meetings for broadcast was accomplished through NYCMedia, the New York Film Academy, various NYC public access stations and volunteer film makers.

To provide better consistency in 2016, MOVA is purchasing dedicated filming equipment and has created a YouTube TV Channel, housed on YouTube and linked from the www.nyc.gov website. This link can be found on the MOVA webpage and will enable us to broadcast and post the VAB meetings as well as to archive each meeting for public viewing and historical reference. MOVA is also working with public access television to broadcast and reach additional communities throughout the city.

In 2016, the VAB will hold its Borough meetings in Borough Halls throughout the city, and in other city public locations. Further, the VAB's decision to post its annual schedule months in advance will enable Veterans Affairs to provide advance notification to the community to maximize public engagement and transparency. Rotating VAB meetings throughout the Boroughs has already enabled the VAB to provide increased access and advice to MOVA on community issues of importance in real time.

As MOVA Commissioner, I have continued to regularly consult with the new VAB leadership and greatly appreciate its members' expertise and enthusiasm in assuming their new duties. I have regularly engaged with the VAB, consulting with and seeking their input on multiple issues, including the transitional process establishing the new Department of Veterans Services; key community concerns and interests; best practices in recruiting and retaining veterans in the City workforce; regularly scheduled consultation sessions between me and the VAB Chair; collaboration on identifying VAB agenda items and access to executive briefings as requested.

Further, MOVA assisted the VAB with identifying specialists from other City Agencies to provide executive and public session briefings, including available New York City jobs; Department of Finance Tax Benefits for Veterans, proper identification needed to apply for the City of New York Municipal ID Card with the Veterans' Designator; Workforce1 and Priority1 services; and introduction of the new Community Outreach Specialists. These newly-hired specialists are currently attending the VA Benefits training course for New York State certification and VA accreditation, following which they will provide satellite services and outreach support in all five boroughs.

I encourage all to access the VAB 2015 annual report and meeting minutes available on the MOVA website. This end-of-year report provides a strong foundation upon which MOVA and the VAB will build during this next year; I greatly appreciate the work which this document represents and know that this is just the beginning of a new era of achievement advancing the interests and needs of NYC veterans and their families. Further, I am especially grateful to former VAB members for their willingness to continue serving in place through this transition period as a new group of VAB members was selected by the Mayor and Speaker.

In keeping with the core values and strategic vision of the Mayor as well as the Speaker, the newly appointed and reappointed VAB members represent a diverse range of service experiences across several eras of service; a broad expanse of occupational domains and life experiences, to include the public, private and social profit sectors, spanning academia, business, arts, health and entrepreneurship.

The current membership is:

Joe Bello
Patrick Devine
Charles Greinsky
Todd Haskins
Charles Hernández
Samuel Innocent
Mariel Juarez
Jules Martin
Wendy Charece McClinton
Anthony Odierno
John Rowan

I think you'll agree that the future burns bright for New York City veterans and their families, whose voices and concerns will be superbly represented by this remarkable group of individuals who have stepped up to assume their new duties as members of the Veterans Advisory Board.

I am indeed proud and honored to work with such accomplished veterans on behalf of those who have served us. Indebted to the contributions of all who have served previously on the VAB, I know that our work ahead will demand our collective best efforts. Looking back on 2015, the VAB met six times, covering all five boroughs:

January 26, 2015 -- VAB meeting convened at Chair Eric Ulrich's office in Manhattan.
April 21, 2015 -- VAB meeting convened at the Family Justice Center in Manhattan.
August 19, 2015 -- VAB meeting convened at the Workforce1 Center in Brooklyn.
October 22, 2015 -- VAB meeting convened at the Bronx Library Center in the Bronx.
November 16, 2015 -- VAB meeting convened at the Queens Borough Hall.
December 7, 2015 -- VAB meeting convened at the Staten Island Borough Hall.

Team MOVA and the VAB have worked intensively over these past several months of transition and implementation of the VAB legislative reforms to establish clear rules of engagement; two-way channels of communication and mutual roles and responsibilities. Whether figuring out the logistics concerning VAB meetings, consulting on questions of policy and potential legislation, discussing the factors involved with standing up a separate agency, collaborating at community meetings aimed at providing quality permanent housing to veterans, or participating in community events of local and national scope. The VAB has also provided guidance and support for MOVA's efforts on ending veteran homelessness.

Off to a strong and promising start, MOVA and VAB are poised to achieve even more in 2016.

In closing, I would like to thank Todd Haskins for his leadership in taking the helm as VAB Chair and serving so capably to lead the Executive Committee and the entire VAB during these past several months. I look forward to the way ahead and remain indebted to each of you for all that you do for the greater good. New York City veterans and their loved ones deserve our best.

Chairman Ulrich, and Members of the Committee on Veterans -- thank you again for your leadership and for this opportunity to meet with you again in this new year. At this time, I am pleased to address your comments and questions. Thank you.

CITY OF NEW YORK
VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD

Joe Bello: A native New Yorker who served 11 years in the US Navy/Naval Reserves, Mr. Bello is an active and visible advocate within the NYC veterans' community; he currently runs NY Metro Vets, an informational site for veterans, military personnel and their families in the New York Area and is a regular contributor to the Gotham Gazette and Task and Purpose.

Patrick Devine: A Vietnam veteran who served 2 years in the USMC, Mr. Devine has served in multiple American Legion leadership positions at all levels and has been inducted into the New York State Veterans Hall of Fame; he has served as a member of CB 10 for over 35 years and is the Founder and Chair of the Bicentennial Veterans Memorial Park Inc. in the Bronx.

Charlie Greinsky: A Staten Island native who served 10 years in the US Army and NY Air National Guard, Mr. Greinsky is retired from city and federal service, including board membership on the Civilian Complaint Review Board; he currently serves as Commander of the Jewish War Veterans Council of the United States of America, Staten Island Post 80.

Todd Haskins: A veteran who served 6 years in the USMC, Mr. Haskins is the Co-Chair of the Goldman Sachs Veterans Network and Captain of the Goldman Sachs IBD Veteran Recruiting Team; he currently serves as Managing Director in the Goldman Sachs Financial Sponsors Group and is recognized as a distinguished veteran leader through his work with Veterans on Wall Street.

Charles Hernandez: A veteran who served in the New York Air National Guard, responding to 9/11 as Military Liaison for the Office of Emergency Management and deploying to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Mr. Hernandez has extensive experience working with at-risk youth; he is fluent in English, American Sign Language, and Spanish and is certified in School Administration and Supervision in New York.

Samuel Innocent: A US Army veteran specializing in clinic asset management and logistics, Mr. Innocent served as Staff Assistant for Veteran Affairs and Urban Initiatives for the City University of New York (CUNY); he served as the President of the Student Veterans Association at City College and was also a fellow at the Colin L. Powell School of Civic and Global Leadership and a Pat Tillman Foundation Scholar.

Mariel Juarez: A US Army veteran who proudly served in the US Army 101st Airborne Division, Ms. Juarez has extensive experience providing resources and counseling support to veterans and their families; fluent in Spanish and English, she currently serves as a readjustment counselor at the Staten Island Veteran Center, where she works with veterans undergoing transition and reintegration challenges.

Jules Martin: A veteran who served 4 years in the US Navy and 30 years in the New York Police Department, Mr. Martin served as Vice President for Global Security and Crisis Management at New York University prior to his recent retirement; he also served on the Civilian Complaint Review Board and remains active in many civic and professional organizations.

Wendy Charece McClinton: A US Army veteran who served for a decade during the Operation Desert Storm era, Ms. McClinton is the New York State Commander of the National Association for Black Veterans (NABVETS); she also serves currently as the Chief Executive Officer with Black Veterans for Social Justice, Inc. and the National Association for Black Veterans.

Anthony Odierno: A decorated US Army veteran who served as Aide-de-Camp to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mr. Odierno serves in the Office of Military and Veteran Affairs at J.P. Morgan Chase, where he leads a variety of programs to assist the military and veteran community in the areas of employment, housing and education; he also serves as Chair, Board of Directors for the Wounded Warrior Project.

John Rowan: A US Air Force veteran who served as a linguist in Vietnam and Okinawa, Mr. Rowan has served as the National President of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) since 2005, and has been active since VVA's inception in 1978; he retired from city service as an investigator with the City of New York's Comptroller's Office and is a founding member and the first president of VVA Chapter 32 in Queens.



2015 NEW YORK CITY VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD REPORT

**A REPORT ON NEW YORK CITY'S VAB ACTIVITIES FOR 2015
AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2016**

Mayor de Blasio and Council Speaker Mark-Viverito:

2015 was an historic year for veterans in New York City. Through legislation and increases in funding for veteran services a strong foundation has been laid for future success. Therefore, as we proceed into 2016 we must seize the opportunity to build upon this foundation to deliver the most comprehensive and effective local veteran policies and services in the nation. We look forward to working with the administration and the City Council to realize this opportunity.

Why Local Veteran Policies are Important:

As the largest city in the United States, the moral imperative for New York City to support its veterans is clear. The economic imperative is less well known but no less important as investments made in support of this population benefit all New Yorkers. Activities and venues such as Fleet Week, New York's Fourth of July Celebration, America's Parade, the Intrepid Sea Air and Space Museum and the Canyon of Heroes all are connected to our nation's veterans and provide significant commerce and character for our city. To quote Commissioner Sutton "veterans are our city's leading renewable natural resource" and our city benefits from attracting them to New York and creating a supportive environment for them to continue their service as our citizens."

What we have Accomplished

2015 was a watershed year for the City of New York:

- Legislative achievements have laid the foundation for New York City to become the leader in local veteran policy. Local laws 24, 25 and 113 have reformed the Veteran's Advisory Board and called for the establishment of the Department of Veteran Services to better coordinate veteran activities.
- Significant investments were made in the Mayor's Office of Veteran Affairs ("MOVA"). As the budget was increased more than any other time in MOVA's 29-year existence, and staffing was more than tripled during the year.
- A citywide effort to end veteran homelessness has made significant progress. This included collaboration across multiple federal state and city agencies and the non-profit and private sectors. Veteran homelessness dropped by more than 50% and the city continues to make progress towards our stated goal of reaching "functional zero."
- Veterans were also included in a number of marquis outreach programs including the municipal ID Card (IDNYC) and ThriveNYC.

Even though we are still in the early stages of this investment, outside entities have taken note of the progress made. For example, the US Interagency Council on the Homeless (USICH) recognized New York City for "effectively ending chronic veteran homelessness" and Commissioner Sutton was the only local official to be recognized among the "We are the Mighty" 25 veterans poised for impact in 2016.

The Road Ahead

The single most important strategic initiative will be to establish the Department of Veteran Services with a clear mission and the resources required to succeed. At the

tactical level, we must continue our campaign to end veteran homelessness and ensure policies are in place to sustain these achievements. Integration with ThriveNYC and community outreach through programs such as the veteran designator within the IDNYC program must be fully built-out. New investments to partner with our educational institutions and economic empowerment are vitally important to attract veterans to our city.

Future policy and program initiatives should be oriented around supporting opportunities for veterans to continue to serve as local citizens. Consistent with the theme of service we must share our successes with other local agencies and convene leaders from other cities to share experiences. As good stewards of Federal and State resources this leadership will support their continued investment in New York City.

Acknowledgements:

None of the successes we have had would have been possible without the support of our committed partners. We have the most passionate and dedicated advocates in the nation. They are the eyes and ears of the community and their tireless efforts are critical to our success. MOVA has taken quantum leaps forward and now has the potential to become a world-class government organization. They have built consensus and support from across city government and as a result have garnered more focus and resources for our veterans. Lastly, the City Council's Committee on Veterans has provided visionary leadership which led to the landmark legislation signed into law last year.

New York City has made great progress over the last year but the job is far from complete. We call on our elected officials to continue to with these investments and make New York City the leader in veteran policies and services.

On behalf of the New York City Veteran Advisory Board,

Very truly yours,



Todd Haskins
Chairman

NEW YORK CITY VETERAN ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Board Member	Borough	Email (@gmail.com)	Term Expires	Appointment
Joe Bello Secretary	Bronx	JBelloVABNYC	June 4, 2018	Council
Patrick Devine	Bronx	PDevineVABNYC	November 19, 2017	Council
Charles Greinsky	Staten Island	CGreinskyVABNYC	August 23, 2017	Mayor
Todd Haskins Chairman	Manhattan	THaskinsVABNYC	February 17, 2018	Mayor
Charles Hernandez	Bronx	CHernandezVABNYC	March 31, 2018	Council
Samuel Innocent Vice Chairman	Brooklyn	SInnocentVABNYC	August 23, 2017	Mayor
Mariel Juarez	Brooklyn	MJuarezVABNYC	February 17, 2018	Mayor
Jules Martin	Manhattan	JMartin1VABNYC	February 17, 2018	Mayor
Wendy McClinton	Brooklyn	WMcClintonVABNYC	June 4, 2018	Council
Anthony Odierno	Manhattan	AOdiernoVABNYC	August 23, 2017	Mayor
John Rowan	Queens	JRowanVABNYC	November 19, 2017	Council

RATIONAL FOR LOCAL VETERAN POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Serving in the United States Armed Forces, whether on Active Duty, the National Guard or the Reserve component demands exceptional bravery, strength and courage, not only from the men and women who serve but from their families at home. New York State has the fifth largest veteran population in the United States with nearly one million residents who have served their nation (including over 67,000 women veterans who volunteered to serve) and is the third largest military state with 90,000 residents who currently serve in our armed forces. Almost 12,000 service members are deployed from New York State at any given time, with the majority coming from the New York City area. Although large-scale military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have officially concluded, the United States has been engaged in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) for over a decade and we expect that the demands on our military to answer our nation's call will continue.

Why Should the City Support its Veterans?

Some have suggested that the burden of caring for our veterans should be born only by the Federal Government. We do not agree and believe that New York City as well as the non-profit and private sectors have both moral and economic imperatives to support our veterans. While human and hard capital is required, New York City will benefit from these investments and they will more than pay for themselves over time:

- **Freedom and Security – the Moral Imperative:** First and foremost all citizens of New York benefit from the freedom and security provided by our armed forces. The Federal Hall National Memorial reminds us of the contributions of our first President, George Washington who noted that *“the willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”* In our order to ensure our continued success as a nation it is critical that we ALL support our veterans and New York as the economic capital of the world benefits from that blanket of freedom more than any other city.
- **Federal Spending and Tourism – the Short-term Economic Imperative:** New York City benefits disproportionately relative to other cities from federal spending and tourism, and our veteran policies support the continued attraction of these resources. Activities and venues such as Fleet Week, New York's July Fourth Celebration, America's Parade, the Intrepid Sea Air and Space Museum and the Canyon of Heroes all are connected to our nation's military or veterans and provide significant commerce for the city. Further, as the economic capital of the world, many Veteran Service Organizations (“VSO”s) and veteran focused non-profits have chosen to call New York City their home or host significant operations or events here which also add to the commerce of the city. These activities and venues provide a compelling economic rationale for supporting strong veteran policies.
- **Veterans Make Great Citizens – the Long-term Economic Imperative:** Veterans are truly this country's greatest renewable resources and attracting them to New York City supports the continued success of our city. It is no surprise that the so-called “Greatest Generation” had the highest proportion of citizens who served in the armed forces. Veterans tend to have higher earnings and lower unemployment than

non-veterans once their transition is complete.¹ Veterans also tend to be more civically active and have lower incarceration rates than non-veterans. Recently transitioned veterans also carry with them Federal Benefits such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill which add to the economic resources of the city and educational systems such as CUNY.

¹ Overall unemployment among veterans is lower than the population as a whole while unemployment among post 9/11 veterans remains higher than average. This highlights that veterans transitioning back to the civilian world are a critical constituency for policy investment.

CHANGES TO THE VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD

The members of the New York City Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) are charged with advising the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) on all matters concerning veterans in New York City, including making recommendations concerning city policies and laws related to veterans and their families.

In February 2015, Intro 619-A (Local Law 25) and 611-A (Local Law 24) were signed into law by Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Local Law 25 (Intro. 619-A) requires the board to meet five (5) times per year – once in each borough, with notice of each public meeting provided in accordance with the public notice requirements of article 7 of the public officers law, and with each public meeting recorded and broadcast in accordance with subdivision d of Section 1063 of the New York City Charter. It also gives the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) the responsibility of ensuring that notice of any public meeting of the Veterans' Advisory Board is posted on its website with the date, time and location of each public meeting, and that such notice is posted not less than one week prior to each public meeting. Lastly, it requires the board to include in its annual report of activities; policy and legislative recommendations for the Mayor's Office and the City Council.

Local Law 24 (Intro. 611-A) expanded the number of Veteran Advisory Board members from nine (9) to eleven (11) and required Advisory Board members to have e-mail addresses dedicated exclusively to the conduct of the business of the board, which must be published publicly by the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs.

In April 2015, Mayor Bill de Blasio and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito announced seven (7) new members to the Veterans Advisory Board along with two (2) reappointed members.

In July 2015, City Council Speaker Mark-Viverito announced (1) new member and (1) returning member to the Veterans Advisory Board.

In August 2015, the board voted on and selected its Executive Committee:

- Todd Haskins (Chairman)
- Samuel Innocent (Vice Chairman)
- Joseph A. Bello (Secretary)

Each member of the VAB is serving a three (3) year term; the Executive Committee roles are reelected by the members of the VAB annually.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS OF THE VAB IN 2015 AND PLANS FOR 2016

Below is a summary of the key activities for 2015:

- **Met or Exceeded all Legislative Requirements:** The VAB met or exceeded legislative requirements. However it was a rebuilding year as we implemented the changes required by Local Laws 24 and 25.
- **Advised the Commissioner and members of the Administration and City Council on a Variety of Policy Matters:** The VAB was actively involved in the discussions around key legislative, organizational and policy initiatives.
- **Enhanced Working Relationship with MOVA:** A central tenant of any advisory body to be successful is that it must have the trust of the entity it is advising. As such, many of the initial actions taken by the board were designed to enhance communication and improve trust between MOVA and the VAB. These included discussion of the use of confidential information and more frequent informal communication between MOVA and the VAB regarding its key initiatives.
- **Conducted 6 Meetings including at least one in each Borough:** With the adoption of Local Laws 24 and 25 and the appointment of all new board members by the middle of the year it was operationally difficult to comply with the law in its first year. However, we as a board made this a priority and hosted meetings in every Borough by year-end. Given these operational challenges, notice was posted in accordance with the letter of the law, however we do not believe that they were well publicized and as a result many of the meetings were not as well attended as would be ideal.
- **Local Representatives Host the Public Session:** In keeping with the spirit of more community engagement we instituted a policy whereby one of the representatives of the Borough in which the meeting is held hosts the public forum for that meeting. This provides more opportunity for members of the board to actively participate in the meeting and to highlight issues which may be particularly important for that specific Borough.
- **Established Committees:** The VAB has a number of members who have experiences across a wide range of topics relevant to veteran policy. In order to more effectively and efficiently align those talents to various policy initiatives the board has established five committees. They are:
 - Housing
 - Healthcare
 - Economic Empowerment
 - Communications
 - Legal Services

In 2016 the VAB plans the following initiatives:

- **Shape the Department of Veteran Services:** The most important activity of 2016 will be to work with MOVA and the community in order to shape the capabilities and mission of the DVS. During the meetings we host leading up to its establishment we will create opportunities for the community to engage and participate in this process.
- **Revise the By-Laws of the VAB:** The VAB has been working with legal counsel to revise the By-Laws and expect to complete this activity in 2016.

- **Encourage Increased Community Engagement:** The VAB plans to encourage increased community engagement. This is particularly important as we enter the critical formative period of the DVS, as well as implementations of the ThriveNYC plan that includes veterans. We also plan to make the board's meeting schedule more accessible by providing more advance notice and hosting them at each respective Borough Hall so they are more predictable. We will also enlist the help of the Borough Presidents and other officials to encourage attendance.
- **Advocacy for Legislative Policies:** Now that many of the internal and operational issues have been revised we expect to advocate more systematically for legislative and policy initiatives both within the city and outside of the city where such policies impact New York City.

SUMMARY OF 2015 EVENTS FOR NEW YORK CITY

2015 was a momentous year for veterans in New York City. The below timeline highlights a number of the key initiatives and accomplishments throughout the year:

- **January – MOVA Completes 90 Day Assessment:** The beginning of the year saw the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs complete a total top-to-bottom review of the entire office as well as review of the veteran's community and its issues. This effort, which informed the Mayor's Strategic Plan, highlighted a number of key areas of development for MOVA and the city's veteran policy.
- **February – Revamp of the Veterans Advisory Board:** Mayor Bill de Blasio signed into law Local Laws 24 and 25 which modified both the structure of the VAB expanding its members from 9 to 11 as well as adding numerous additional operating requirements designed to increase access to the community. Specifically, the new law changed the meeting requirements from quarterly to at least one in each Borough and also mandated that the meeting be held publicly to provide for additional connectivity with the community.
- **May – Fleet Week:** New York City successfully hosted another fleet week and MOVA supported a number of ceremonial activities throughout this period designed to honor our service members and veterans. Also, the Mayor hosted a roundtable which included senior military leaders representing all five services and the VAB to discuss issues related to transition and reintegration. Additionally the First Lady hosted a shipboard roundtable which included military spouses from all five services where topics relating to military/veteran stressors, strengths and opportunities were discussed. We believe that these events had an impact on policy and communication.
- **July:**
 - **Significant Budget Increase and Investment in Human Capital:** The expansion of the MOVA budget from \$0.6mm to \$1.9mm represents the largest increase in its 29 year existence. Throughout the year much of this has been invested in human capital. Since January 2015, MOVA's full-time authorized staff has more than tripled from 6 to 20. The majority of these new hires are veteran coordinators who provide direct services to veterans such as benefits counseling, peer mentoring and access to community resources including mental health, housing and employment support. The capstone of this investment in capability is the adoption of Local Law 113 which calls for the establishment of the Department of Veteran Services. This action will no doubt require additional resources and bring capability to bear. In our assessment these investments while still in process have already generated significant return for the city and its veterans and will prove to be even more successful as the pace of change slows and the team can focus on provided vital services to our city's veterans. The budget increase also put money into the City's fight to end veteran homelessness.
 - **Veteran Designator added to IDNYC Municipal ID Card:** New York City included a veteran designator to its municipal ID card program – the first large city to do so. Those with this card are provided complimentary access for a year

- to over 30 cultural institutions in the city which is a wonderful way to welcome the newest veterans to the city. At year-end approximately 3,000 veterans have received a municipal ID card with the veteran designator.
- **New VAB Members In Place:** The last of the newly appointed or reappointed members of the VAB were announced in July allowing the board to effectively begin its efforts for the year. Mayor Bill de Blasio and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito announced seven (7) new members to the Veterans Advisory Board along with two (2) reappointed members.
 - **October – MOVA Moved to One Centre Street:** In October MOVA moved its offices to One Centre Street, the David N. Dinkins Municipal Building in honor of one of the city’s most celebrated veterans. This meaningfully improved the environment in which the staff and the VSOs which are also housed in the office space operate.
 - **November:**
 - **Veterans Week:** The city hosted another successful Veterans Week. In addition to significant participation in “America’s Parade” by city officials New York City also witnessed the additional of a symbolic new Flag Ceremony. In recognition of those who have served the flags of all five services joined the National, State, City and POW-MIA flags throughout the period designated as Veterans Week.. This visible symbol of respect for our military, veterans and their families highlights the city-wide support. Lastly, the Mayor continued the tradition of hosting the Mayor’s Veterans’ Day breakfast in honor of service which included approximately 250 civic, military, veteran and VSO advocacy leaders shortly before many of these same leaders participating in America’s Parade, the largest Veterans’ Day parade in the nation.
 - **America’s Parade:** Though hosted by the United War Veterans Council, the administration has a strong hand in the success of America’s Parade. This is also an example where New York benefits from its veteran programs through both commerce and communications. This year, according to the United War Veterans Council, 264 organizations participated in the parade and the NYPD estimates that there were ~50,000 participants with ~600,000 spectators. The parade was televised in a number of cities and viewed by approximately 96,000 viewers and it was also streamed live through Military.com allowing for great advertising for the city. It has been estimated that this resulted in \$7.2mm of economic activity for New York City.
 - **Commitment to Invest in Veteran Mental Health as Part of ThriveNYC:** The Mayor, along with first lady Chirlane McCray released New York City’s Mental Health Roadmap (Thrive NYC). In the report lists several initiatives that will help veterans and their family members, including integration of the 311 system to the VA’s Veteran Crisis Line, expanding the Veterans Outreach Team and the creation of a Veterans Holistic Treatment Fund.
 - **December:**
 - **Establishment of the Department of Veteran Services:** Mayor de Blasio signed into law Intro. 314-A (**Local Law 113**) which creates a new Department of Veteran Services. This new bill will transform the Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs into the new Department in July 2016 and provides the Department with the responsibility to cooperate with federal, state, and local agencies to inform

and assist members of the armed forces, veterans and their families in matters relating to: educational training and retraining services and facilities; health, medical, and rehabilitation services and facilities; provisions of federal, state, and local laws and regulations giving special rights and privileges to members of the armed forces, veterans, and their families; employment and re-employment services; and other appropriate matters. Additionally, this bill amends the New York City Administrative Code to require the Department to publish information on its website concerning resources intended to assist veterans in obtaining employment, and to consult with city agencies to identify job postings for inclusion on the Federal veterans' job bank. Finally, the bill requires each city agency to designate an employee to act as a liaison with veterans within the agency, and the Department to provide periodic training to the veterans' liaisons, as well as to post on its website the names of the liaisons at each city agency.

- **Recognized by the USICH as Effectively Ending Chronic Veteran Homelessness:** On December 29 the US Interagency Council on the Homeless ("USICH") certified that New York City had effectively ended chronic veteran homelessness. While we recognize that there is further work to be done, this is an important recognition of the city's broader efforts to end veteran homelessness.
- **Progress Towards "Functional Zero":** Homelessness is a difficult subject because it is never really "ended" in a large city; in fact in New York City nearly 100 veterans and their families become homeless in any given month, so as a policy matter we strive to reach "functional zero." For New York City this level is approximately 300, with the goal of placing identified homeless veterans in permanent housing within 90 days. As of December 31, 2015 approximately 760 veterans or their families were housed in shelters in New York down from 1558², a more than 50% drop. This contrasts with only a 5% drop in homelessness overall (from 60,939 to 57,839) and highlights that the administration has used the additional resources targeting veteran homelessness effectively.

For the benefit of all New Yorkers, we have advised MOVA to closely monitor its efforts in order to determine which policies, processes and procedures are most effective. These models can possibly applied to other at-risk populations in the city in order maximize the value of the city's investment in its veterans for the benefit of all New Yorkers.

² Official number reported to HUD following the point-in-time survey in January 2015

STAFFING OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF VETERAN AFFAIRS

In 2015 there were substantial changes to the structure and staffing of MOVA. Below is a summary of the positions of the office on January 1, 2015 and January 1, 2016. In addition to those listed below, the inclusion of veterans as part of the ThriveNYC program will provide an additional \$0.5mm of funding which will be used primarily for additional community outreach staffing. The job descriptions and number of personnel is still being finalized but we expect approximately 6 additional staff members from this initiative. MOVA has managed the pace of change well and has filled 17 of the 20 positions. At year-end only three remain unfilled and each are part of an active search to identify the best possible candidate.

	January 1, 2015	January 1, 2016
1.	Commissioner	Commissioner
2.	Deputy Commissioner	Deputy Commissioner
3.	Chief of Staff	Military & Social Services Coordinator
4.	Military & Social Services Coordinator	Social Services Manager
5.	Social Services Manager	Administrative Coordinator & Special Assistant to the Commissioner
6.	Administrative Coordinator & Special Assistant to the Commissioner	Senior Policy Analyst
7.		Peer to Peer Coordinator
8.		Peer to Peer Coordinator
9.		Peer to Peer Coordinator
10.		Peer to Peer Coordinator
11.		Peer to Peer Coordinator
12.		Community Outreach Manager
13.		Community Outreach Specialist
14.		Community Outreach Specialist
15.		Community Outreach Specialist
16.		Community Outreach Specialist
17.		Community Outreach Specialist
18.		Assistant Commissioner & Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives
19.		Project Manager
20.		Americorps VISTA

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2016 AND BEYOND

While we have made great strides in the last year, great opportunity lies ahead. The following sets forth a number of key policy recommendations for the Mayor and the Speaker to consider.

- **Capabilities and Structure of the Department of Veteran Services:** It is rare that new city agencies are established and it will be critical to identify the capabilities and structure required of the DVS in order to realize the mission and vision which is identified. It is important that the public who advocated so hard for this legislation has a voice in identifying its required capabilities and structure and it will be critical that our elected officials follow-through with the appropriate funding and resources in order for New York City to make good on this solemn promise to its veterans.
- **Mission and Vision Statement:** Every military unit, whether permanent or temporary has a mission statement. This is a critical foundational statement which provides context and purpose to the organization and helps prioritize its actions. In establishing the Department of Veteran Services (“DVS”) we have a unique opportunity to engage stakeholders in shaping and developing a formal mission statement for the department and concurrently a vision statement for New York City. These should aim to capture the spirit of our veterans and what they can contribute to our city and should avoid highlighting “veteran as victim” policies.
- **End Veteran Homelessness:** The recognition by the USICH that New York has ended Chronic Veteran homelessness is a great milestone; however the true goal of these efforts is to end veteran homelessness. . Even once “functional zero” is achieved this mission will not be complete as veterans are at risk every day and nearly 100 new veterans become homeless every month. The city must continue its vigilance in this endeavor
- **Communication:** New York City has made significant investments in its veteran population – more than at any other time in at least the last two decades and more than the vast majority of large cities in America. Despite this fact, a perception remains particularly among the veteran community that New York City is not supportive of its veterans. We believe much of this stems from an underinvestment in communication and this will be a critical area to improve if we are to achieve success in our broader objectives. The administration and MOVA should review its communications policies and procedures and seek significant enhancements in capability for the DVS. This should include a revised website, social media, community calendar and refined processes which will increase the community’s awareness of opportunities to serve and benefits for which they may qualify.
- **Outreach to Other Local Governments:** As the leader in local veteran policy for large cities, New York City should convene leaders from other local governments to share best practices and continue to engage with Federal and State authorities on ways to improve veteran policy nationwide. Taking this leadership role will give New York City access to additional Federal and State resources from which our city and its veterans can benefit. We have proven we are effective stewards of resources provided by Federal and State Agencies and we believe we should be provided with additional resources.

- **Education:** New York City is the nation's largest importer of college students with 110 colleges and nearly 600,000 students. We should work actively with these institutions to create efficient pathways to attract veterans to our city. Not only does this support positive migration of educated citizens into the city, but this effort also carries with it the added benefit of Federal investment as the majority of transitioning veterans have access to the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Specifically, the city should partner with its local colleges and universities to create a joint marketing and outreach effort to transitioning veterans considering educational opportunities to "continue their adventure" by studying in New York City.
- **City Employment:** This city expects to face significant shortfalls in many of its high paying jobs. MOVA has made good progress in highlighting those job opportunities to veterans, however we believe this program can be expanded and the city investigate more formal outreach to bases in the north east to help recruit talented veterans. This effort will benefit city agencies as much or more the veterans themselves by reducing talent acquisition costs and increasing the quality of the applicant pool.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Consistent with New York City's investment in entrepreneurship the city must develop a strategy around supporting veteran owned businesses as they establish and grow. New York should adopt a veteran owned small business preference program. The city should also investigate opportunities to partner with the civilian sector to support continued development of small businesses.
- **Veteran Census and Data Capabilities:** Effective policy is informed by data. Unfortunately the city's data regarding its veteran population is severely lacking. In order to be effective and relevant New York must have more current and comprehensive data about its veterans and MOVA should invest in resource and capability towards this end. This should be integrated with the new communications plan to make it as efficient and real-time as possible and also ensure that linkages are set to provide data regarding veterans to other agencies and levels of government where appropriate.
- **Invest in Federal and State Relationships:** We believe New York has among the most comprehensive and effective veteran programs and policies of any city in the nation. We should seek to expand our relationships with the Federal and State governments in order to ensure that the City receives the corresponding support. The recent recognition by the USICH of our ending chronic veteran homelessness demonstrates that New York City is a good steward of the capital and resources provided by Federal and State governments.
- **Review and Expand Veteran Treatment Courts:** As was highlighted in the September 18, 2015 City Council hearing on this topic, Veteran Treatment Courts have been proven effective in a variety of jurisdictions including New York City. Currently these are operating in 3 of the 5 boroughs. These programs should be reviewed with a Veterans Legal Task Force in order to ensure consistency across the boroughs and that we city is achieving a favorable return on this investment. Also, a veteran treatment court should be established in Manhattan and Staten Island.
- **Identify and Measure the Impact of Veterans and Veteran Policies and Activities:** As noted in this report, we believe that sound veteran policies have a

positive impact on all New Yorkers, not just veterans. These benefits range from the economic impact from activities and venues such as Fleet Week, America's Parade, the Intrepid Sea Air and Space Museum and the Canyon of Heroes, to the federal resources such as GI Bill educational benefits and State and Federal programs which support veteran housing or medical care to the economic impact of veteran owned businesses among others. MOVA should find opportunities to identify and quantify these resources so that all New Yorkers are aware of the benefits of these investments.

- **More Engagement with Community through the VAB Meetings:** As the board continues to advise on and support policy initiatives which benefit the city it would be helpful to have more engagement from the City Council and local elected and appointed officials at the meetings. This will increase awareness of the topics which are important to the veteran community and help drive effective policy.

MINUTES FROM 2015 VETERAN ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS

The minutes for each of the six meeting hosted by the VAB follow.

**New York City Veterans Advisory Board
346 Broadway 3ed Fl. East Wing
New York, NY 10013**

**Meeting at office of Council Member Eric Ulrich
Chairman - NYCC Veteran's Committee
250 Broadway Rm. 1555
January, 26 2015**

Re: Into No's 600, 611, 619

Attending-

Redmond Haskins
Eric Bernstein - NYCC General Council,
Jason Hansman
Vince McGowan

On the conference call line –

Marvin Jeff-Coat
Pat Devine
Lee Cavino

- This meeting achieved its quorum of 5 members

The meeting concentrated on the 3 pieces of legislation;

Intro No. 600 - sponsored by Council Member Vallone & 11 other members

Intro No. 611 - sponsored by Council Member Eugene & 5 other members

Intro No. 619 - sponsored by Council Member Ulrich & 12 other members

Copies of these documents had been distributed prior to the meeting.

Veteran Advisory Board Additional Recommendations

- Timely appointment of Committee members.
- No more than 90 days after a position opens.
- Definition of a Veteran consistent with NYS definition.
- Committee can meet in Executive Session
- Include Veterans Tax exemptions
- Add the note on all city paychecks "R U a Vet"
- Add SBA to list of those who report activity on Veterans activity

We were informed that this legislation is on a fast track and we should be hearing more on how it is developing

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for April 21, 2015 meeting held at:
Family Justice Center, Manhattan
80 Centre Street, 5th Floor * New York, NY 10013

MINUTES

Members Present:

Todd Haskins
Charles Hernandez
Samuel Innocent
John Rowan
Anthony "Tony" Odierno

Jules Martin
Vincent McGowan
Pat Devine
Mariel Juarez
Paul Rieckhoff

Absent:

Charles Greinsky – Called in
Lee Covino – Called in
Wendy McClinton
Anthony Giovinco

Start time 1700 Hrs.

Executive Session

- Board members introduced themselves to one another
- Legal counsel distributed copies & explained current local law and subsequent laws, rules & regulations that guide the actions of the NYC VAB

Public Session

- Introduction of NYCC Veterans' Committee Chairperson, Eric Ulrich
- Introduction of the MOVA Commissioner Loree Sutton
- Board members introduction
- Review of Agenda & minutes from previous meeting by Vince McGowan
- Old Business – NYC Small Business Services exclusion of veteran owned business from goal orientated program was addressed
- New Business-
 - 1) Established Board protocols & Electing VAB Chairperson was raised
 - 2) Established meeting schedule for the remainder of 2015
 - 3) Suggestions on how VAB should operate moving forward
- The floor was open to the public for questions/comments

Meeting Adjourned: 2000 Hrs.

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for August 19, 2015 meeting held at:

Brooklyn Workforce 1 Career Center
9 Bond Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)	Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)	Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Joe Bello (Bronx)	Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
John Rowan (Queens)	Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)	Vincent McGowan (Ex-Officio)

Absent:

Pat Devine (Bronx) Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn) – Called in.

Minutes

- John Rowan, Interim chair commenced the meeting.
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.
- **Elections** were held and the following individuals were elected to one (1) year terms:
 - Todd Haskins - Chair
 - Samuel Innocent – Vice Chair
 - Joe Bello – Secretary
- Todd Haskins assumed chair duties.

Old Business: None

Presentations:

MOVA. Commissioner Sutton greeted the board members, welcomed the newly appointed members and congratulated the newly elected officers. She briefly overviewed jobs available at MOVA, the IDNYC card and workforce1. The Commissioner also announced that MOVA would be moving to 1 Centre Street in September and that Ms. Nicole Branca is the new Assistant Commissioner & Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives. She also introduced members of her staff to the board and audience.

Workforce1. Daniel Nisbett Jr. gave a briefing on who they are and what they do. They announced that 16 veterans were hired as teacher's assistants with the Department of Education and talked about jobs for veterans at the Barclay's Center.

IDNYC. Mr. Luke Hayes talked about the IDNYC Card and the veteran's designation. He also discussed the benefits available to veterans and stated he would be available for any questions.

Ft. Hamilton. CSM Fauntleroy talked about America Serves and how the DoD is working with them. Talked about the need to get veterans into jobs as DoD pays over 800 million in unemployment benefits. To help with this, he stated that two directives were signed last December. One was to give Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) access to the base (Fort Hamilton) and the other one gives access to non-profits and non-DoD base members and their families. Lastly, CSM Fauntleroy stated that he will be transferring soon.

Catherine LaPorte from MOVA discussed jobs available within NYC and the September 10th "Hire Our Heroes" job fair.

Public Comments: The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Trent Love:

Robert L. Swann: Talked about NYC Vendors issues and City Relations.

Robert Furman: Talked about the Brooklyn Preservation Department and the burial of veterans. Want to commemorate the Battle of Brooklyn by establishing a memorial park at 3rd Avenue and 9th Street in Park Slope Brooklyn as it's believed that the Marylanders who died fighting were buried in that area.

Dr. Robert Farley: Talked about Vendors, Homelessness and Clothes for veterans. Stated that he provides free legal services for veterans and that he will be operating out of a McDonalds in every borough because he was not being offered any space at the new MOVA location.

Dondi McKellar: Talked about NYC Vendors. Stated that there are 20,000 vendors operating in NYC and only 853 licenses are available. Talked about specialized disabled veteran's food vending permits (V-permits, which have no caps). Stated he, working with the Street Vendors Project have submitted a proposal to the Speaker's Office.

Howard Dalton: Talked about NYC Vendors. Discussed 35a, a state law which governs how to vend in New York City.

Bill Moses: Stated that he work for the Department of State since 1997 and is now looking for a venture in which to serve veterans.

New Business: None.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: October 2, 2015 (Bronx)

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for October 22, 2015 meeting held at:

Bronx Library Center
310 East Kingsbridge Road
Bronx, NY 10458

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)	Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)	Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)
Joe Bello (Bronx)	John Rowan (Queens)
Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)	
Vincent McGowan (Ex-Officio)	

Absent:

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)	Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)
Pat Devine (Bronx)	Jules Martin (Manhattan)

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting. (5 PM)
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Old Business: The board reviewed the minutes from August (Brooklyn). The Chair followed up on **Rev. Robert Farley** comments during the public session, in which he stated he was not being offered space at the new MOVA location. In speaking with Commissioner Sutton, this statement was not true as he was offered space but wanted a bigger location, which MOVA could not accommodate. He has a standing offer to return to MOVA if he should chose so in the future. The minutes were accepted by the board. The chair also informed the board and audience that our last two meetings for 2015 will be on November 16th and December 7th respectively.

Presentations:

MOVA. The Chair stated that we were given a briefing earlier by Deputy Commissioner Laporte and MOVA's VAB liaison Latisha Russaw regarding the structure changes currently taking place. MOVA has increased from 4 to 19 people and they're in the process of putting an outreach specialist in each borough with each individual being an overlapping backup to another borough. The chair stated that MOVA is in the process of completing interviews for those positions. The chair also announced that MOVA has moved into their new space at 1 Centre

Street and while they are unpacking, they are up and running. Lastly, the chair talked about the upcoming veteran's week and that if any of the board members or audience knew of any events, please make MOVA aware of it.

IDNYC. Mr. Mohammad Kaba talked about the IDNYC Card and the veteran's designation. He also discussed the benefits available to veterans and stated he would be available for any questions.

Vince McGowan (UWVC). Ex-Officio McGowan talked about this year's Veterans Day parade (Americas Parade). This will be the 95th consecutive parade and it will start at 11 AM. There will be three (3) hours of consecutive parade coverage from WPIX-11.

Public Comments: Board member Charles Hernandez hosted this part of the meeting. The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Trent Love: Talked about creating a multi-media virtual tour of the Bronx. He is looking for help to develop an app. He has an African-American History presentation with QR Code.

Latasha Peeler: Talked about NYC street vendor's issues. She talked about the Harlem Vets Center facilitating a group called Vets4Vets. She also talked about the problems with Veteran Vendors v. Undocumented vendors, as well as the Black market and rent-a-vet problems. She passed out a letter that was sent to the City Council (copy given to the board) as well as the creation of a survey and meeting on November 18th with City Council Veterans chair Eric Ulrich. John Rowan asked her about Newspaper stands and Vince McGowan asked her to follow up on that. Lastly, Ms. Peeler talked about a 10-week guitar program that the Harlem Vet Center is conducting and how after the 10-weeks you get to keep the guitar.

Paul Gill: Stated he was an OIF vet. Talked about a shortage in the VA budget (\$2.9 million), the increase to MOVA's budget and what can they do with the new budget. He also talked the City of Boston and how its veteran's budget is \$45 million and how NYC allocates less than half of that. Lastly, he talked about Intro. 314 and the need to create a Veterans Department in NYC.

New Business: The chair recognized **Joe Mondello**, who was appointed by Bronx Borough President Rubin Diaz Jr. as the Chair of the Bronx Veterans Advisory Council. Joe gave greetings to the members on behalf of the Borough President and talked about some of the items the council has worked on and is currently working on. He thanked the board for its work and looks forward to us coming back to the Bronx in 2016.

Racquel Levine from NYLAG, a legal non-profit organization that provides assistance to veterans, spoke about how they have a volunteer based project that helps connect veterans to benefits. They currently have a grant from the City Council.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: November 16, 2015

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for November 16, 2015 meeting held at:

Queens Borough President's Office
120-55 Queens Blvd
Kew Gardens, NY 11415

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)	Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)	John Rowan (Queens)
Joe Bello (Bronx)	Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)	
Vincent McGowan (Ex-Officio)	

Absent:

Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)	Pat Devine (Bronx)
Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)	Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting. (6 PM)
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Old Business: The board reviewed the minutes from October (Bronx). The minutes were approved. The chair reminded the board and audience that our last meeting for 2015 will be on December 7th in Staten Island (location TBD).

New Business: The chair asked the board for a vote of support commending the Mayor and City Council for establishing a Veterans Department in NYC. The vote was unanimously approved.

Presentations:

MOVA. Commissioner Sutton and Deputy Commissioner Laporte gave updates on:

Homelessness: Current number is at 800 moving quickly towards 700. The system has been fully developed to get to functional zero by the end of the year. Current entry is 100 vets per month into the system with a 90-day turnaround. The City has been making available the information regarding incentives to landlords to take in veterans. Assistant Commissioner Branca has obtained a 250K grant from Deutsche Bank to assist with preventative care.

Mental Health: The Commissioner announced that the First Lady of New York City will be announcing the Mental Health Roadmap very shortly.

IDNYC: There was a brief discussion on the IDNYC numbers in regards to veterans and how Queens has the largest number of veterans of any borough and the word needs to get out.

Personnel: Deputy Commissioner Laporte introduced new outreach personnel for MOVA. There is also a social media person now. There was a reminder that MOVA has increased its numbers and that they're in putting an outreach specialist in each borough with each individual being an overlapping backup to another borough. They are still looking for a Staten Island outreach person.

Public Comments: Board member John Rowan hosted this part of the meeting. The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Dr. Fritz Fils-Aime: President of Haitian American Veterans Association (HAVA). He talked about deported veterans from Haiti and Mexico and how we must help them. Most of them are Vietnam Veterans and the largest deported veterans are living in Mexico. He also talked about starting a Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) chapter in Haiti. John Rowan told him they would talk.

Stanley Scriven: Stated he works for Easter Seals and does outreach to veterans.

Gerald Cherenfant: Introduced himself as a US Navy veteran (retired) and has just started working at the Brooklyn Vet Center.

Rhonda Mona: Stated that she was an Army Reservist (OIF/OEF) and was looking for services.

Ryan Graham: Introduced himself as the VFW Queens County Commander. 6 years Air Force. Anyone looking to join the VFW, come see him. Talked about how the Queens VFW did Community Service on Veterans Day and the Flushing VFW Post did a 5K walk that raised money for the community.

Paul Narson: Introduced as the President of VVA Chapter 32. Talked about the need for better communication and how he wants others to come to Queens to work with veterans there. Stated that he didn't march in this year's Veterans Day parade (and neither did a number of others) because they are too old. Talked about how the Queens Veterans Day parade is growing but the VFW and Legion didn't come out. Need to better coordinate with them in the future..

There was a brief discussion on the Indigent Burial Program for Veterans. Paul Narson and John Rowan discussed the program (VVA and VFW) and MOVA stated that they were looking for more organizational friends for this program.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: December 7, 2015

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for December 7, 2015 meeting held at:

Staten Island Borough President's Office
10 Richmond Terrace #120
Staten Island, NY 10301

Members

Present:

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)
Joe Bello (Bronx)
Vincent McGowan (Ex-Officio)

Samuel Innocent (Bronx)
Anthony "Tony" Odierno (Manhattan)

Absent:

Charles Greinsky (Staten Island)
Mariel Juarez (Brooklyn)
Charles Hernandez (Bronx)
Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)

Pat Devine (Bronx)
Jules Martin (Manhattan)
John Rowan (Queens)

Minutes

- Todd Haskins (Chair) commenced the meeting. (6:30 PM)
- All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Old Business: The board reviewed the minutes from the November meeting (Queens). The minutes were approved.

New Business: The chair asked the board for a vote of support commending the Mayor and First Lady on the Mental Health Roadmap (ThriveNYC) regarding Veterans in NYC. The vote was unanimously approved.

The Chair also announced the creation of five (5) sub-committees to the Advisory Board. They are: (1) Housing (2) Healthcare (3) Economic Empowerment (4) Communications (5) Legal Services.

Presentations:

MOVA. Commissioner Sutton talked about the Year in Review. She discussed her initial listening tour, IDNYC, MOVA's new office location, additional staffing to the office, the new Mental Health Roadmap and the new Department of Veterans Services.

Personnel: MOVA Deputy Commissioner Laporte gave an update on new outreach personnel for MOVA and made introductions. She reminded the audience that they will be trained on doing claims and will be certified by the State Division of Veterans Affairs. She also stated that a DAV & VA Outreach coordinator would soon be embedded with MOVA. Deputy Commissioner Laporte also talked about employment and how New York City is hiring. Lastly, she spoke about the Home Owner Tax (State) for owners.

IDNYC. Mr. Luke Hayes (Field Director) talked about the IDNYC Card and the veteran's designation. He also discussed the benefits available to veterans and stated he would be available for any questions.

Public Comments: Board member (Vice Chair) Samuel Innocent hosted this part of the meeting. The following individuals gave public comments to the board:

Michelle Paton: Talked about the systematic closing of the Brooklyn VAMC. She stated that she was at a rally that was held in July and that she doesn't want to go to the Manhattan VAMC. Talked about the closing of the surgery wing and how it's slated to be an outpatient clinic. She asked how we (the board) can help.

Cedric Smith: Stated he works for Black Veterans for Social Justice. He also talked about the possibly closing of the Brooklyn VAMC and how we need to rally. He is concerned about affordable housing for veterans (vs. income based housing). Mr. Smith stated that veterans need to rally for housing with the state support. He also talked about and showed pictures of "Liberty Village", a veteran's village in Amityville, Long Island.

William Smith: Also works at Black Veterans for Social Justice (BVSJ). Talked about veteran housing and programs at BVSJ. He asked if anyone needs help to reach out to them.

Lee Covino: Former Vice Chair of the VAB. He talked about the Veterans School Tax Exemption and how the City is not following the law and how veterans need to write their elected officials to get the city to respond. He asked if the board could help. Joe Bello stated he had spoken with the Public Advocates office regarding this and would follow up with him.

Joe Bello shared information regarding the Haitian American Veterans Association (HAVA) Golden Gloves Boxing fundraiser on March 29th, 2016 at Club Amazura, 91-12 144th Place, Jamaica, NY. The chair thanked everyone for coming out and reminded everyone that today was the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. He also stated that information on the board & its members can be found on MOVA's website.

Meeting Adjourned.

Next Meeting: TBD, 2016

Submitted by: Joe Bello, Secretary

NYC Veterans Alliance
www.nycveteransalliance.org

Testimony by Kristen L. Rouse
NYC Veterans Alliance

Hearing on Oversight:
Veterans Advisory Board: Impact of Last Year's Reforms

NYC Council Committee on Veterans

January 13, 2016

My name is Kristen L. Rouse, and I am a veteran of the United States Army. I served three tours of duty in Afghanistan, and I live in Brooklyn. Over the past year, I have served as President and Founding Director of the NYC Veterans Alliance, the only local-level organization that has, to date, provided detailed policy recommendations to NYC government based on surveys and direct input from the NYC veterans community.

Last year we advocated for reforms to the city's Veterans Advisory Board, envisioning this as a great start toward revitalizing the role of a body that our community had seen as ineffective in meeting its chartered purpose to advise MOVA on the needs of NYC veterans. Nearly a year later, we see that the VAB has indeed changed as a result of these reforms. But we must state here that the new VAB is not yet in compliance with the letter—or the spirit—of the laws that were passed last year. If we truly believe that veterans deserve the best support from government possible, then we simply cannot accept low standards and a continued lack of accessibility, presence, and transparency for this important government body representing NYC's veterans.

First, we are disappointed that some newly appointed members of the VAB have not been regularly attending meetings. With all due respect for our fellow veterans, it must be pointed out that Mr. Greinsky, Mr. Devine, and Ms. Juarez have each attended only one of the five meetings since the reforms took place. Ms. McClinton attended only two. This means that four of the eleven VAB appointees had in-person meeting attendance records of less than 50%. We understand that everyone is busy, but we recommend that if VAB members choose to continue serving the terms of their political appointment, they should attend more than half of the meetings and be part of the VAB's presence in communities. It should go without saying that if the VAB is required to hold in-person meetings in all five boroughs—then most of the VAB's members should be there, too.

Second, we are disappointed that the implementation of the email addresses mandated for VAB members ended up being Gmail.com accounts rather than city email addresses. It should also go without saying that, at a minimum, these email accounts should work. Yet when I tried to email Mr. Devine this week, a return message came back saying that his email address did not exist. The intent of having dedicated email addresses was for all VAB members to be accessible as representatives of the veterans community who we could reach out to. This endstate simply has not been met.

Third, meeting notices have not been in compliance with the requirements of last year's reforms. The VAB is required to publish notice of each public meeting in accordance with Article 7 of the public officers law, with meetings scheduled at least one week in advance, and the announcement made to news media and posted conspicuously in public areas at least 72 hours in advance. The VAB is further required to notify veterans organizations by email and post the notice on MOVA's website at least one week in advance. These requirements have not been met. For example, the November meeting was announced by email and on social media (a "conspicuous public area") only four hours in advance of the meeting. Other meetings have come on such consistently short notice that many of us have been unable to attend. Again, we realize everyone is busy, but these last-minute announcements are not only out of compliance with the law, they also minimize the attendance and participation of the public and veteran organizations in these important meetings.

Fourth, last year's reforms required the VAB to record and broadcast each meeting in accordance with section 1063 of the City Charter. There has never been any announcement of broadcast times for these meetings, and there has been no link or mention of any video recordings until they appeared—almost as if out of nowhere—on the MOVA website yesterday afternoon. This is better late than never—but again, this coming at such a late hour, and long after the meetings themselves, only minimizes public participation and knowledge of the VAB's activities.

Fifth, and most importantly, the VAB has been tasked with advising MOVA on "all matters concerning veterans," and to keep a record of its deliberations to that end. It must be noted here that, as of this testimony, there have been no records of the VAB's actual deliberations posted online in the meeting minutes or elsewhere. Meeting minutes only briefly describe presentations by MOVA and city agencies, and announcements of events or initiatives that a VAB member brings up. There are also brief notes showing public testimony, although there is no detail or follow-up noted for any of the concerns or issues raised by members of the public indicating that VAB members are even addressing this in their deliberations. There has also been no record of any actual advisement that VAB members or the VAB as a body have made to MOVA, City Council members, or any government agency over the course of the year. I've heard anecdotally about VAB members acting in an official capacity over the last several months, meeting and speaking privately with agencies, public officials, and organizations—yet

there is no public disclosure of who, when, or where VAB members are meeting or acting in this official capacity, or what issues were even addressed. Last year's reforms required the VAB to be transparent in its official functions, yet the VAB is failing to disclose its actual activities and functioning outside of the public portion of its meetings. It is disappointing that even after last year's reforms, the VAB is little more transparent than it was previously.

Lastly, the VAB's end of year report—a summary of the VAB's advisement over the course of a year—was mandated to be completed no later than December 31st, a deadline that came and went without explanation. Yesterday afternoon, less than 24 hours before this oversight hearing, the end of year report appeared on MOVA's website. The report states repeatedly that good policy recommendations are important, but only appears to state what MOVA is already planning for its transition into a Department of Veterans Services this year. This appears to be a report by MOVA to the veterans community—which would be the first time MOVA has actually produced any written product for our community— but does not in any way reflect deliberations by VAB members or advisement of the VAB to MOVA on behalf of the veterans community. There is no mention of recommendations or input from members of the public who spoke during the meetings, which included members of my organization, such as veteran street vendors who were at most of the VAB meetings last year, or the property tax exemption issue that has been brought to the VAB and to City Hall for several years now with no result. Meeting minutes show a VAB member stating he would refer this to the Public Advocate's office, but mention of deliberations or meetings with the Public Advocate appear nowhere in the end of year report. In short, the VAB's end of year report is interesting, but not what was mandated by last year's reforms. If the VAB is indeed advising MOVA or other government entities, the end of year report must reflect the deliberations of VAB members and the outcomes of what they advised based on its public meetings and other official activities and deliberations. If MOVA wishes to issue a public report—we recommend that it do so through its own channels, and not use the VAB as its mouthpiece.

In summary, VAB appointees should continue to serve in their appointed government roles only if they can regularly attend meetings in person, be accessible and interactive with the NYC veterans community, and disclose their official functions in a written record in order to provide the transparency required by last year's reforms. Meetings must be announced in

advance, and any written report must show that the VAB is actively advising MOVA and other government entities, and not the other way around.

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

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS
Eric A. Ulrich, Chair

**Oversight: Veterans Advisory Board
Impact of Last Year's Reforms**

Testimony by Amie Leonard
Veteran Advocacy Project
Urban Justice Center
January 13, 2016

Good Afternoon Veterans Committee and fellow advocates. My name is Amie Leonard, and I am a staff member at the Urban Justice Center's Veteran Advocacy Project. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the impacts of the Veteran Advisory Board.

It is important to look back on the impact of Veterans Advisory Board over the past ten months, but it is equally important to look forward and see how the Board's recommendations could affect hundreds of thousands of New York City veterans.

In February 2015, the City Council amended the responsibilities of the Veterans Advisory Board, adding board members and duties with the intention of creating a more robust Board that efficiently and effectively serves the interests of this community. Most important this Board was revamped with the intention of creating a communicative and transparent link between the City's veteran community and the Mayor's Office. We applaud the efforts of the current Veteran Advisory Board, including the fact that this week it made video of many—but not all—of its meetings available through the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs website. We also hope that it will continue to try to meet and exceed all legislative requirements, especially with regard to communicating all deliberations via video and the written word.

Per regulation, the Veterans Advisory Board must submit an annual report of its activities to the Mayor and the City Council, including policy and legislative recommendations by December 31 of each year. Yesterday, January 12, the Veteran Advisory Board's 2015 report was made publically available. Having reviewed the Board's 2015 Report, the Veteran Advocacy Project would like to reinforce three of the Boards recommendation's to the Mayor and the City Council.

1. Ending Veteran Homelessness
2. Investing in Federal and State Relationships
3. Review and Expanding Veteran Treatment Courts

Ending Veteran Homelessness. While it was announced that New York City has achieved “functional zero,” the business of eviction is booming and veteran homelessness has not ended. Veterans are evicted daily and the population's risk of homelessness is prevalent. As stated in the Board's annual report, nearly 100 *new* veterans become homeless every month. Furthermore there are many men and women who served our country but do not self-identify as veterans, veterans who have shelter but no permanent home, and veterans who may be couch surfing.

The City's efforts to end veteran homelessness are valuable, but pre-eviction efforts to prevent homelessness must be increased. The Veterans of our city have selflessly served our nation, and increasing prevention efforts tells our veterans we want to return that service.

Investing in Federal and State Relationships. As mentioned in the annual report, the Board believes that New York City has among the most comprehensive and effective veteran programs in the nation. To ensure that we continue to have the most comprehensive and effective programs, we must guarantee that veterans with less than honorable discharges are supported.

The vast majority of veterans with less-than-honorable discharges are denied federal benefits including VA Pension, Disability Compensation, HUD-VASH vouchers, and health care. Therefore veterans with less-than-fully-honorable discharges face barriers to housing, treatment, and income; all of which are essential to healing and transitioning to civilian life. Many veterans are not aware of the implications of a less-than-fully-honorable discharge, let alone alternative resources for support when they need it. The Advisory Board is in a unique position to advise the Mayor's Office on these gaps in services, advocate for providers to fill in those gaps, and educate veterans and our community on the impact of a less-than-fully-honorable discharge.

Review and Expanding Veteran Treatment Courts. As the Committee knows, Manhattan and Staten Island lack veteran treatment courts. Many of the Veteran Advocacy Project's low-income and homeless veteran clients are criminal-justice-involved and suffer from mental health issues that might be service-connected. We support the great strides that have been made for criminal-justice-involved veterans in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. When a veterans' court is established, a community of stakeholders forms around it, all of whom are fighting recidivism. With the help of stakeholders, the veterans' treatment court can be the starting point of holistic healing for a veteran, which can include assistance in obtaining the benefits he or she has earned. Between Manhattan and Staten Island, we serve many veterans who would profoundly benefit from the expansion of veteran treatment courts, and we hope that the review of the success in the other boroughs will encourage the establishment of courts in Manhattan and Staten Island.

In closing, we applaud the strides this Board has made since the reforms of 2015, and the Veteran Advocacy Project wants to support the Board's call to end veteran homelessness, to invest in federal and state relationships, and to expand veteran treatment courts. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Dan McSweeney
Incoming President, United War Veterans Council
New York City Council, Committee on Veterans
Testimony, 13 January 2016

Chairman Ulrich, members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to speak on the role and progress of the Veterans Advisory Board.

As we all know, 2015 was a landmark year for veterans issues in New York. Through the creation of the City's Department of Veterans Services, greater and more focused efforts by our great community of advocates, the establishment of a veterans designator on our city ID cards, a new and invigorated Veterans Advisory Board, great advances in combating veterans homelessness, and an enhanced Veterans Week, we have turned a corner in recognizing and offering greater support for veterans and their families.

These efforts have helped strengthen the bonds within our ranks and between citizens and government. The age-old adage that nothing can replace shared effort in creating community holds true. Many of our leaders agree that New York is the best city in America – and the world – for veterans and an indispensable part of this recognition is the Veterans Advisory Board, whose members and leadership have worked diligently to establish greater outreach and coordination among our diverse and talented constituents.

I want to commend the VAB and its ^{LEADERS} ~~chair~~, Todd Haskins, ^{SAM INNOCENT, AND JOE BELLO} for all they are doing. Their relationship with the mayor and City Council includes a comprehensive series of initiatives which will benefit all of us.

Since 1985, United War Veterans Council has been involved in the overall effort of supporting veterans. I'd like to briefly describe two areas in which we are continuing and expanding our efforts on behalf of veterans and the city at large, working closely with the VAB.

1. Veterans Week: We organize a series of inclusive events that keep veterans front and center in New York's (and the country's) consciousness. This culminates with America's Parade, which this year attracted close to 300 participating groups and over half a million spectators, and reached audiences across the United States with the right messaging on who veterans are and what we offer society. Our broadcast and online partners, including Google and Military.com allowed the goodwill surrounding Veterans Day to be carried far and wide, including to vets who could not attend because of their stay in VA Hospitals. The economic impacts to New York are undeniable and are only growing as we enhance and fine-tune our work. We are already in detailed talks with government officials, veteran support organizations, and corporations to directly link the New York events with Los Angeles and that is just the beginning of our expansion.

2. Prosper.vet: UWVC co-founded the country's first-ever fully integrated veterans entrepreneurship platform. In partnership with NYU and support from city, state, and federal officials, we are offering education, training, and incubation support for our

veteran entrepreneurs. Their considerable talent and ambition places them at the epicenter of efforts to improve the local economy and has national implications. If they can make it here, they'll make it anywhere and we are fortunate to have a front-row seat in the effort.

I mention these two activities because they fit perfectly into the VAB's strategic vision. The VAB is an essential element of the interface between veterans and New York City government. I share in the gratitude that our broader community feels for all they are undertaking in this critical time.

United War Veterans Council looks forward to continuing to support the VAB in 2016 and well beyond as a non-partisan, good-faith partner in our shared goals and objectives. I want to congratulate every members of the Veterans Advisory Board for their leadership, determination, Gotham grit, and strategic insights.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these thoughts.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor in opposition

Date: 01/13/2010

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I represent: Veteran Advocacy Project

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Name: Loree Sutton

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I represent: Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs

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Name: DAN MCSWEENEY

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I represent: UNITED WAR VETERANS COUNCIL

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Name: Samuel Innocent

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I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: Lionelle Hamanaka

Address: 66W 94 St NYC

I represent: Military Families Speak Out

Address: _____

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Date: 1/13/2016

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Name: Todd Haskins

Address: 254 West 123rd St New York NY 10027

I represent: The NYC Veteran Advisory Board

Address:

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Name: JOSUE ALVARADO

Address: 106-10 OTIS AVE, CORONA NY 11368

I represent: SELF

Address:

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Date: 1/13/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kristen Rouse

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I represent: NYC Veterans Alliance

Address: PO Box 532 NY NY 10159

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