



REMARKS OF EDWARD HILL

DIRECTOR, FATALITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

MAYOR'S OFFICE TO COMBAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

"PROVIDING SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES
STRUGGLING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND POST
TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER"

September 23, 2009

Good afternoon Chairperson Sanders, Chairperson Mealy, and members of the City Council Committees on Veterans and Women's Issues. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of Commissioner Jimenez of the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence (OCDV) about the City's initiatives addressing services for domestic violence victims—specifically veterans. My colleagues from the Mayor's Office on Veterans' Affairs testified on the impact of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on veterans returning to New York City as well as our efforts to reinforce the collaboration between our two offices to effectively and efficiently serve veterans who are domestic violence victims and seek services at the New York City Family Justice Centers. I will provide testimony on the City's response to domestic violence and specifically on the services available through the Centers that currently operate in Brooklyn and Queens.

Domestic violence, which can include physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse, is a significant health and safety concern. It is a pattern of behaviors designed to achieve and maintain power and control over another person. Domestic violence can affect any person, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, income, gender, disability status or sexual orientation. Last year alone in New York City the police responded to over 230,000 domestic violence incidents, an average of over 600 incidents per day, and the City's Domestic Violence Hotline answered almost 135,000 calls, an average of 370 calls per day. While domestic violence remains pervasive, there is also encouraging news: over the last seven years we have seen a 24% decrease in all family-related crimes and an 8% drop in family-related homicides. Significantly, female intimate partner homicides have decreased by almost 30%.

Despite these reductions, we know that veterans and their spouses face unique challenges in regards to domestic violence. Because so many veterans may be at increased risk for perpetrating acts of domestic violence, it is important to note that there are resources available in the City to assist batterers. Annually, the City spends over \$500,000 on batterers accountability programs. Participation in these programs is usually mandated by the courts as part of a criminal disposition. These programs differ from anger management classes in that they bring groups of batterers together to learn how to take responsibility for past actions and how to be accountable for them.

For any victim trying to leave an abusive relationship there are both personal and institutional challenges. They may be unaware of where to get services, fear that they will not get the help they need or that they will not qualify for services. To escape domestic violence, a victim must often leave everything behind, and start over with nothing – no home, no money, no job. Reaching out for help takes a tremendous amount of courage. Through strong private/public partnerships, the City is working to address and eliminate some of those barriers that victims face in seeking and maintaining safety.

The City's efforts encompass the work of 14 City agencies, including criminal justice, social service and health, which address the issue of domestic violence. This administration spends over \$227 million each year for social and legal services, shelter and housing, criminal justice intervention, training and prevention, among others. Our office has also secured almost \$10 million through private foundations, individual donors and competitive grants.

One of the most effective ways the City facilitates access to services is through the New York City Family Justice Centers, an initiative of OCDV in partnership with the

District Attorney's offices. The one-stop Centers are where City agencies and community based organizations have co-located to provide wraparound services for domestic violence victims and their children. These innovative Centers enable victims to meet with a prosecutor, speak with a trained counselor, and apply for housing assistance in just one visit – all in their language while their children play safely in the next room. The City's first Center opened in Brooklyn in July 2005 and since then has had over 52,000 client visits including over 5,000 children's visits. Due to the overwhelming success of the Brooklyn Center, the City opened a second Center in Kew Gardens, Queens in July 2008, which has had over 9,000 client visits, including over 900 children's visits, since its opening. A third Center is currently under development in the Bronx and will open before the end of this fiscal year.

We made these Centers as friendly and accessible as possible. A client can get a broad range of services at the Centers – including (1) counseling; (2) civil legal assistance, (3) parenting classes; (4) assistance with housing applications; (5) elder abuse services; and (6) spiritual support. The client can also meet on-site with one of 20 community based partners and/or with a representative from the District Attorney's Office or a variety of City agencies such as the New York City Police Department, Department of Probation, or the Human Resources Administration. Lastly, if the client has physical injuries or expresses a need to be connected to a medical provider, we have formal partnerships with nearby Health and Hospitals Corporation facilities where the client can be directly linked to the Domestic Violence Coordinator at the facility. To assist the client in gaining economic independence, the Centers also provide

self-sufficiency services such as English as a Second Language classes, resumé and interview preparation classes and on-site connections to job readiness programs, vocational training, and financial planning.

While the clients receive services at the Center, their children can visit Margaret's Place, a children's room funded by the Joe Torre Safe at Home Foundation, where they can play, read books available and, if appropriate, be connected to specialized children's counseling.

Before clients leave the Center, they are asked to complete a client satisfaction survey, currently available in both Spanish and English. This survey helps us learn how to better assist clients. Results from the first round of surveys conducted during June of this year indicate that 96% of the clients who completed the survey were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience at the Centers. We are committed to making it as easy as possible for all domestic violence victims to get the help they need and expanding and enhancing services based upon what clients tell us.

While the Centers have many services available for domestic violence victims, the formalized referral process to which Commissioner Newman testified will help ensure that all veterans visiting the Centers are aware of additional services and benefits to which they might be entitled based on their military status. While the New York City Family Justice Centers will continue to provide clients with domestic violence services, they will also be linked to veteran-specific benefits such as: (1) military trauma counseling; (2) employment placement; (3) job training; (4) education assistance; (5) medical referrals; and (6) assistance accessing other military benefits.

This referral process will enhance an already existing relationship between our Brooklyn Center and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, New York Harbor Health Care System, Brooklyn Campus. This relationship has allowed veterans or their spouses in need of domestic violence services to be referred directly to the Center through the victim services unit at the Kings County District Attorney's Office. In addition, counseling staff from the Veterans' Administration Medical Center Brooklyn Campus regularly attend the Elder Abuse Taskforce meeting and the Quarterly Health Care Symposium at the Center. The referral process with the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs will afford us the ability to identify veterans who do not come to the Centers through the Veterans' Administration Center and ensure that all veterans served at the Centers are informed about additional benefits and services to which they are entitled. The success of this relationship has led the Veterans' Administration New York Harbor Health Care System to appoint a coordinator for domestic violence victims, including elder victims, to address issues that arise at all four Veterans' Administration Medical campuses in New York City. Through this service coordination, appropriate cases have also been referred to our Queens Center.

Over the past couple of years, OCDV has undertaken several initiatives to increase awareness of the services at the Centers and increase the number of victims reaching out for, and obtaining, appropriate services. One such program is the New York City Family Justice Center Early Victim Engagement (EVE) project. Research indicates that domestic violence victims are most likely to utilize services if they are contacted as soon as possible after a violent incident. A defendant in a criminal case must be arraigned within 24-hours and, at arraignment, judges make bail determinations

and routinely issue criminal orders of protection. Victims are typically not present at arraignment, so they are often unaware of the status of the case. Since the program's inception in April 2008, EVE Project teams consisting of a District Attorney's Office paralegal and a nonprofit victim advocate based in Criminal Court have contacted over 5,400 victims annually immediately post-arraignment to provide the victim with information about the outcome after arraignment, including whether an order of protection has been issued, and link the victim to services at the Center. Significantly, since the EVE Project started, there has been a 42% increase in clients meeting with the District Attorney's Office to discuss their criminal case.

Over the past year, OCDV has partnered with the Department of Homeless Services to train over 400 shelter staff in the Bronx and Brooklyn on domestic violence. Topics covered in the training have included identifying and properly screening for domestic violence and making appropriate referrals for services. This program will be expanded during October to include shelter staff working in Queens.

In closing, over the past seven years we have been collaborating with City, state, federal and nonprofit partners to help all domestic violence victims – including veterans. We recognize, however, that there is still more to be done. We look forward to continuing these efforts and to working with the Council on our shared goal of reducing domestic violence in all communities. Thank you.

ROGER NEWMAN
COMMISSIONER



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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

**Testimony of Roger Newman,
Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs,
Concerning Services for Veterans and Their Families with Domestic
Violence and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Before the Joint
New York City Council Committee on Veterans Affairs and
Women's Issues**

September 23, 2009

Good afternoon Chair Sanders, Chair Mealy and members of both the Veterans Committee and the Committee for Women's Issues, my name is Roger Newman and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs (MOVA). With me today is Latisha Lemott from MOVA, and Edward Hill from the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence. Ms. Lemott serves as MOVA's Service Coordinator and as the facilitator of a monthly support group for military women sponsored by MOVA in collaboration with the Manhattan Veterans Center. We are here today to testify on the issue of domestic violence and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as they relate to veterans and their families.

Let me first give you some statistics on the effect of PTSD and domestic violence in military families. Research indicates that there is a link between Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and domestic violence in military families. A 2006 study published in the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy revealed that veterans with a diagnosis of PTSD were significantly more likely to perpetrate violence towards their partners – with 80% committing at least one act

of violence against their spouse in the previous year. The Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder estimates that domestic violence rates among veterans and active duty service members is three times higher than rates seen among civilians. In addition, the PTSD Center reports that 40% of women veterans report having experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime. The occurrence of domestic violence among veterans is of particular interest since almost a quarter of a million New York City residents are veterans and there are approximately 4,000 City residents currently on active military duty overseas.

MOVA operates as a conduit for veterans in need of the many services provided throughout the City. For instance, MOVA will work with the New York City Housing Authority to find section 8 housing for veterans or work with the VA in providing benefits for a client who may have called 311. Thus, while my office does not provide direct services for victims of domestic violence or persons with post traumatic stress disorder; we do make referrals to the appropriate agencies or organizations that may assist the victim or rehabilitate the batterer. In the case of domestic violence, we would refer the victim to one of the Family Justice Centers, or in a case involving a veteran with possible PTSD; we would refer the veteran to a Veteran Center. Veteran Centers, operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), provide counseling and other services to persons with PTSD. There are two Veterans Centers in Manhattan and one in each of the other four boroughs.

Each City agency, per Executive Order No. 110, must appoint an agency liaison to meet with MOVA on a regular basis. These meetings create a dialogue through which MOVA and the other agencies can establish guidelines on how to handle specific issues with regard to the veterans community. For instance, after working with MOVA, the NYPD issued Operation Order #34 on August 25th, 2009, which instructs officers to inquire about a person's veteran

status when called to assist and notify MOVA immediately. By alerting MOVA immediately, MOVA can reach out to the veteran and ascertain if there are veteran specific programs that may provide assistance. In the cases of PTSD, MOVA can immediately arrange for treatment.

Similarly, by working with the Mayor's Office of to Combat Domestic Violence's (OCDV) if a victim of domestic violence comes to MOVA, MOVA immediately refers the person to a Family Justice Center and makes Center staff aware that the victim coming in may have issues unique to their or their spouse's military service.

Recently, MOVA and OCDV established protocols to track the number of clients that are veterans or the family member of a veteran. This process allows for an assessment of the correlation between PTSD and domestic violence in the New York City veteran community and assists the veteran or family member in determining what additional services, benefits, or compensation from the various levels of government or the private sector. Furthermore, the Family Justice Center staff to gain greater insight on the elevated risk of violence among military couples due to the PTSD and can act accordingly.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will take questions at the conclusion of Mr. Hill's testimony.

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