

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS jointly with

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, jointly with
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

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Thursday, October 13, 2022

Start: 1:07 P.M.

Recess: 3:13 P.M.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: HONORABLE ROBERT F. HOLDEN,
CHAIRPERSON, COMMITTEE ON VETERANS
HONORABLE JULIE MENIN,
CHAIRPERSON, COMMITTEE ON SMALL
BUSINESS

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
Sandy Nurse
Vickie Paladino
Kristin Richardson Jordan
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Tiffany Cabán
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Darlene Mealy
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

James Hendon
Commissioner
Department of Veteran Services

Ellen Greeley
Commissioner of Strategic Partnerships
Department of Veteran Services

Dynishal Gross
Executive Deputy Commissioner
Department of Small Business Services

Pedro Zapata
Senior Policy Analyst
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Maria Osoria
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NYU Tandon School of Engineering's Veterans Future
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Andrea Tan
Microenterprise Budget Director
Volunteers of Legal Service

Frank Vissage
Disabled Veteran
Street Vendor

Rabba Belkovitz
Disabled Veteran
Street Vendor

Telhutti Elbay

Dan Rossi
Disabled Veteran
Street Vendor

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3 SERGEANT RODRIGUEZ: This is microphone test for
4 the Committee on Veterans jointly with the Committee
5 on Small Business, location Committee Room, uh.
6 Today's date is, uh, October 13, 2022. Um, recorded
7 by (INAUDIBLE) Gonzalez Rodriguez.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Hello everyone, and welcome to
9 today's Hybrid New York City hearing of the Committee
10 on Small Business jointly with the Committee on
11 Veterans. Today, I'm sorry, excuse me. Everyone,
12 please place all electronic devices to vibrate or
13 silent mode. If you wish to submit testimony, you may
14 send it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
16 cooperation. Chairs, we are ready to begin.

17 [GAVEL]

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Good afternoon. Welcome to
19 today's joint Veterans and Small Business Committees
20 hearing to discuss veteran entrepreneurship and
21 public contracting opportunities. I am Council Member
22 Robert Holden, Chair of the New York City Council's
23 Committee on Veterans and I am joined by my
24 colleague, Council Member Julie Menin, Chair of the
25 Committee on Small Business.

1
2 In addition to today's oversight topic, we'll
3 hear my bill, Intro 476, which would require the
4 Department of Small Business Services with the City's
5 Chief Procurement Officer to enable Veteran-owned
6 business enterprises to identify as such when
7 registering to do business with the City. Uh, this
8 bill would also require SBS and the Department of
9 Veteran Services to create a veteran leadership
10 advisory program to educate veteran-owned businesses
11 about the City procurement opportunities and support
12 such business enterprises during the, uh, uh,
13 procurement process.

14 Veterans have a long and rich history of
15 returning home from the service to become American
16 entrepreneurs. Since the post-World War II era,
17 veterans have engaged in entrepreneurial activity at
18 a higher rate than civilians. However, rates of
19 veteran entrepreneurships have been on the decline.
20 According to a 2018 Syracuse University, Institute
21 of, for Veterans and Military Families Report, in
22 1998, 16% of veterans in the labor force were self-
23 employed compared with 12% of non-veterans. But in
24 2018, the same rate declined to 11% for both veterans
25 and non-veterans, so this was due to several factors

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3 including the aging profile of American veterans,
4 difficulty obtaining capital, limited support from
5 medical and disability service providers and a lack
6 of established networks and mentors.

7 I am pleased to see, uh, both SBS and DVS offer
8 programs and services to help veterans overcome some
9 of these hurdles. Today, I hope to evaluate the
10 administration's outreach efforts to educate and aid
11 veterans struggling to navigate the resources at
12 their disposal. In 2015, the administration issued a
13 report entitled "A Roadmap for Supporting Veteran-
14 Owned Businesses." The report underscored the need to
15 identify, track, and improve outreach to increase the
16 participation of veteran-owned business in the City
17 procurement. In 2015, or the 2015 report included
18 seven recommendations to help the City improve data
19 collection and support veteran-owned businesses.

20 Today's hearing aims to assess the progress the
21 administration has made in implementing these
22 concrete recommendations and evaluate the need for
23 further action. I'm looking forward to discussing my
24 bill, Intro 476, which would codify two of the
25 report's recommendation. I believe the City must act
as a centralized point of contact to connect veteran-

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3 owned businesses with the tools and resources they
4 need to thrive.

5 So, my hope is that this hearing, uh, will
6 enhance the public awareness of the City programming
7 and break down barriers to, to, uh, veteran companies
8 and entrepreneurships. Uh, I, I want to thank the
9 Veterans Committee Staff for their work in assembling
10 this hearing, Committee Counsel Nick Connell, uh,
11 Policy Analyst Elizabeth Arzt, uh, as well as my, my
12 Chief of Staff Daniel Kurzyna and Legislative
13 Director Craig Caruana. I don't, I will now turn it
14 over to Chair Menin for her opening statement.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you so much, Chair
16 Holden. I really want to thank you and I want to
17 thank Members of both Committees for agreeing to hold
18 this important joint hearing. My name is Julie Menin
19 and I'm the Chair of the City Council's Small
20 Business Committee. I first of all, want to commend
21 my colleague, Chair Holden, on his leadership in
22 sponsoring Intro 476 in establishing a much-needed
23 certification program for veteran-owned businesses in
24 our City.

25 While the City already has several specialized
certification programs for minority and women-owned

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businesses, locally owned businesses and emerging
business enterprises, no such program exists for our
City's veterans. These individuals risk their lives
for the freedoms that we often take for granted and
at the very least, we should grant them recognition
when choosing to patronize the small businesses many
of them own and operate.

Critically, Intro 467 does not contemplate an
immediate change to the City's complex procurement
rules. There are a myriad of state and federal rules
that govern how and with whom City Agencies can
contract, and I can say that first hand as someone
who served as Commissioner of several City Agencies.
So, a phrase that is often heard but less often
understood is that Agencies are required to contract
with the lowest responsible bidder. This means that
in most cases, City Agencies need to use a
competitive, scaled bidding process to make a
decision on whom to award a contract. The rationale
of course behind this system is that City Agencies
will preserve public funds by contracting with the
lowest bidder that is capable of performing the needs
of a contract.

25

1
2 Rather than change the procurement rules, Intro
3 467 would place the onus on SBS to work with the
4 Department of Veteran Services to development a
5 veterans advisory leadership program, as Chair Holden
6 talked about, to educate veteran-owned businesses
7 about various federal, state, and City procurement
8 opportunities and to support veteran-owned businesses
9 when applying for government contracts.

10 While the bill before our two Committees today
11 would not impact City procurement in the same way as
12 say the City's MWBE program, it would still go a very
13 long way towards acknowledging the many veteran-owned
14 businesses in the City and allow City residents and
15 visitors alike to make informed shopping choices. The
16 goal of this Committee is to support and to elevate
17 the City's small businesses whenever possible. And I
18 think Intro 467 creates a really important
19 opportunity for SBS to do just that for our City's
20 veteran-owned businesses.

21 Before we begin, I just want to acknowledge some
22 of our colleagues who are here, our Majority Whip,
23 Selvena Brooks-Powers, and Council Member Vickie
24 Paladino have joined us. I also want to take the
25 opportunity to thank the Interim Small Business

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3 Committee Senior Counsel Alex Paulenoff as well as my
4 Chief of Staff Jonathon Szott, my Legislative and
5 Budget Director, Brandon Jordan, for their hard work
6 preparing for this hearing and now I'll turn the
7 floor back over to Alex. Thank you.

8 SENIOR COUNSEL PAULENOFF: Thank you, Chair. Uh,
9 Alex Paulenoff, Senior Counsel. Uh, before we begin
10 testimony, uh, please be aware of the following
11 administrative matters. If you are registered to
12 testify, please listen for your name to be called.
13 Witness names will be called in groups to facilitate
14 Council Member questioning. Additionally, if you're
15 testifying virtually via Zoom, Council Staff will
16 unmute you when it's your turn to speak. Please be
17 patient if you are not immediately unmuted.

18 Each witness will be limited to five minutes, so
19 please stop your testimony when the Sergeant calls
20 time. Your understanding of these procedures is
21 appreciated as we ensure that everyone has an
22 opportunity to be heard today. As a reminder, you can
23 submit written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov
24 up to 72 hours after the conclusion of today's
25 hearing.

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2 Uh, members of the administration, I'll now
3 administer the oath. Uh, Commissioner James Hendon,
4 Commissioner of Strategic Partnerships Ellen Greeley,
5 Senior Policy Analyst Pedro Zapata, Executive Deputy
6 Commissioner Dynishal Gross, Chief Diversity Officer
7 Maria Osoria, and Deputy Chief of Staff Matt
8 Sullivan, would you all please raise your right
9 hands? And if I didn't call your name, thank you, uh,
10 do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole
11 truth, and nothing but the truth today and to respond
12 honestly to Council Member questions? Thank you all.
13 You may begin when ready. Commissioner, Commissioner,
14 I'm sorry to interrupt, but I think your microphone
15 is off.

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I am sorry. Oh, sorry. Um,
17 good afternoon, Chair Holden, Chair Menin, Committee
18 Members and Staff, veterans, advocates. My name is
19 James Hendon and I am proud to serve as the
20 Commissioner for the New York City Department of
21 Veteran Services. I'm joined today by DVS Senior
22 Policy Analyst Pedro Zapata. I'd also like to
23 acknowledge my colleagues from the Mayor's Office of
24 Contract Services, Chief Diversity Officer Maria
25 Osoria, and from the New York City Department of

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Small Business Services, Deputy Commissioner Dynishal Gross, Executive Deputy Commissioner Dynishal Gross, who will be available to answer questions from Committee Members.

We welcome this opportunity to testify about entrepreneurship resources and services for veteran small business owners as well as City procurement opportunities for interested veteran-owned businesses.

Veterans have a proven record of entrepreneurial success. Veterans come to business enterprises with critical competencies that relate directly to starting and succeeding in small business, including training and leadership experience, working in teams, planning and executing complex plans. Additionally, veterans are increasingly diverse in economic background, race, gender, sexual orientation, and other categories that have been less represented in small business ownership.

This administration is dedicated to ensuring that veteran entrepreneurs receive the resources they need to succeed. DVS, MOCS, and SBS are fully supportive of the NYC veteran community and are committed to helping veteran businesses open, operate, and thrive.

1
2 NYCDVS supports veteran entrepreneurs by connecting
3 them to resources and services through our robust
4 VetConnectNYC network. Our team of care coordinators
5 utilize VetConnectNYC to connect veteran
6 entrepreneurs to outside organizations that provide
7 unique programs offering a range of small business
8 resources including access to capital, marketing
9 development, business planning, and more.

10 Our Agency website also provides information on a
11 variety of programs and resources, ranging from
12 starting a small business, training programs,
13 business mentorship and networking, certifications,
14 business reporting, opening, grants and loans, legal
15 services, federal relief, COVID-19 relief and more.

16 NYCDVS and SBS also collaborated to create an
17 interactive online map known as VetBizNYC. VetBizNYC
18 enables veteran entrepreneurs to promote their
19 businesses online and encourages the public to shop
20 locally, while also supporting those who served. Our
21 map is currently home to over 300 veteran-owned
22 businesses representing a cross section of industries
23 throughout the five Boroughs including professional
24 services, construction, maintenance, and repair to
25 name a few. DVS and SBS have also conducted outreach

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to encourage veteran business owners to certify their
businesses by applying to the Emerging Business
Enterprise program and/or the Minority and Women
Owned Business Enterprise program.

Most recently, NYCDVS established the Veteran
Business Leadership Association. The VBLA aims to
promote certification and support advocacy, community
outreach, leadership recognition, and education
related successful veteran small business
development. The VBLA's goal is to create a
specialized network for veteran business leaders that
is peer driven and supportive of the community's
unique needs.

In April, VBLA hosted its first workshop for
veteran business owners interested in applying for
NYC EBE certification. Given the successful turnout,
VBLA went on to host three more workshops in May and
June. Topics included growth strategies for veteran-
owned businesses, government contracting strategies,
and translating military skills into business.

In addition to the services and programs offered
by NYCDVS, SBS has programming to help small
businesses including veteran-owned entrepreneurs
start, operate, and grow in the City. SBS helps

1 minority and women-owned businesses get City
2 certified to compete for City government contracts
3 and funding services. They have programs to assist
4 businesses navigate government rules and regulations
5 including providing free mock inspection services to
6 identify violations in advance.
7

8 The newly launched NYC Business Enterprise
9 Business Express Service Team, NYC BEST, provides
10 business owners with one-on-one expert support on
11 getting the appropriate licensing and permits needed,
12 prepares them for inspections, and helps them
13 understand any violations they have received. SBS
14 also helps businesses grow by providing access to
15 capital through federal, state, local, and private
16 funds including banks, credit unions, and nonprofit
17 lenders. With our close partnership with SBS, we get
18 veteran entrepreneurs connected to the right services
19 to help them thrive.

20 DVS is generally supportive of the goals
21 identified in Intro 476-2022. This bill will require
22 the City to enable veteran-owned businesses to
23 identify as such when enrolling to conduct business
24 with the City. DVS fully supports the goals of this
25 initiative. DVS also welcomes the opportunity to

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1
2 continue working with its partners at SBS to grow the
3 Veteran Business Leadership Association the Agency
4 rolled out in April 2022.

5 In conclusion, our City's veterans represent the
6 best of what we have to offer, and this
7 administration is committed to providing them with
8 the support, all the support, they need upon their
9 transition from military service as they build their
10 economic futures. We thank you for this opportunity
11 to testify on this matter and look forward to any
12 questions you or other Committee Members may have.
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Commissioner. Um,
15 so, the City can only provide support and training
16 to, uh, veteran-owned businesses if we track the
17 volume of veteran-owned companies doing business with
18 the City and their needs. Now, you mentioned that
19 there's, uh, in your testimony, there's 300 veteran-
20 owned businesses, uh, in New York City. Um, that's,
21 that's current?

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We have a map which has more
23 than 300 veteran-owned businesses listed and so
24 that's separate from the number of VOBs in the City,
25 Mr. Chair.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. So, what method and
3 mechanisms, uh, does the City utilize to track
4 veteran-owned businesses in New York City? Because
5 that, that's the million-dollar question, like, how
6 do you, what method are you using?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: This cuts two ways. I'm
8 going to defer to my colleague to, uh, Executive
9 Deputy Commissioner Gross as far as how SBS and MOCS,
10 uh, (INAUDIBLE) the Chief Diversity Officer Osoria,
11 how they have, um, eyes on this. The number that we
12 are using, and it's important to state this because I
13 just want to call this out given that we're talking
14 in reference to this report which is a few years old,
15 the old report on this. That we estimate that it's
16 more than 900 veteran-owned businesses in the five
17 Boroughs. So, the count that we have is 900 and, uh,
18 uh, the approximation is 976 as far as what we look
19 at when we think about market size.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: 976, that's.

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: 976 as far as in the five
22 Boroughs that are veteran-owned. We know of the 308
23 that are on the map right now, which we're adding to
24 that day in and day out. And so, as far as the known
25 universe for us, it's the, uh, in the five Boroughs,

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308 on the map, and it's 976 is the broader number
that we estimate to be the population.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, so do you, you know, what
are the principal industries, uh, of New York City's
veteran business owners? Do you track, you know,
where, what areas, uh, they're working in or what
their businesses are? Um, because that, that would
be, uh, very, very useful information if we can get
that. Out of 976, you said?

COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, we've got 976, but this
goes back to something that we always talk about
where this issue with self-identification.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Right.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: As far as we know, the
national number, about 33.1% of veterans self-
identify, that's nationally. It's about 29.7% in New
York state, 24.6% in New York City and so for us,
it's constantly trying to chop down the tree to have
more of our brothers and sisters who own businesses
come into the light.

Uh, when we look at the map, of the 308 that are
on that map, 232 have NAICS codes, or, or North
American Industry Classification System codes. So, we
have those for 232 of those businesses. The top

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fields for that, for those businesses, it's professional, scientific and technical services, are 41% of those we have NAICS codes for. Construction is 22%, uh, of those we have the codes for. Trade, transportation, and warehousing is 11%. Manufacturing is 7%. And then education, healthcare, and social assistance is 5%.

So once again, it's professional, scientific, technical services, then construction, then trade, transportation, warehousing, then manufacturing, then education, healthcare, social assistance.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. So, um, in 2015, uh, SBS, MOCS, uh, DVS in conjunction with the PricewaterhouseCoopers published a report titled "A Roadmap for Supporting Veteran-Owned Businesses." Uh, recommendation number two was to provide veterans an opportunity to self-identify which you mentioned as a business and veteran owned through the Payee Information Portal, which, uh, we talked about in the past. This would allow the City to better track veteran-owned businesses doing business in, uh, with the City because at the time of the report's publication, MOCS was not tracking the veteran-owned businesses that secured City contracts.

1 So, at our last hearing on this topic, DVS
2
3 testified that veteran-owned businesses can self-
4 identify through PASSPort but, uh, does the
5 administration think, uh, it improves function and
6 data collection to identify veteran-owned businesses
7 through PASSPort and through the Payee Information
8 Portal, uh, PIP? Do, do you think that's, that?

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm, I'm going to, I'm going
10 to defer to my colleagues at MOCS and SBS for this
11 one. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, sure, sure.

13 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: Chair Holden,
14 Chair Menin, thank you for allowing us to be part of
15 this, uh, testimony. Again, fellow Council Members
16 and staff. Uh, the MOCS PASSPort system.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Can you push that, pull that
18 a little closer? Yeah.

19 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: Oh, of course.
20 Sorry.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: The mic, yeah.

22 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: Thank you. MOCS'
23 PASSPort system is a Citywide system for any
24 procurement process for all City Agencies. Um, within
25 that system, we have allowed all businesses who are

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3 veteran owned to identify as such and that
4 information is shared with our partners at Veteran
5 Services and Small Business Services.

6 We encourage all businesses who want to work with
7 the City of New York to enroll in PASSPort and we
8 work closely with our partners here to ensure that
9 they get information about how to compete for
10 contracts, how to work with the City of New York. Um,
11 the PIP system is a historic system that vendors have
12 to enroll in order to get paid by the City of New
13 York. That's where they track payments. That's where
14 they can do electronic payment and direct deposit.
15 And that's also where subcontracting information is
16 entered by a prime contractor.

17 But our system is set up in order to allow these
18 businesses to identify as veterans and also to get
19 the services that we provide.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You, you allow them. Are, is
21 there a, um, a box?

22 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: Yes, yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: There is.

24 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: Every business
25 that enrolls in PASSPort to work with the City of New

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3 York has an option to self-identify as a veteran-
4 owned business.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Has an option to self, uh,
6 identify, but, like, but there is a box saying
7 veterans, box, click?

8 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: Yes. It's part of
9 the enrollment.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. Alright. Just to be,
11 alright.

12 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: The enrollment
13 process, yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Just want to make sure cause,
15 so, uh, does, does the, uh, and I think you, you
16 know, you kind of mentioned this, Commissioner, but
17 does the administration support the provision of
18 Intro 476 which would codify that SBS and MOCS, uh,
19 would enable veteran-owned businesses to self-
20 identify when doing business with the City. So, we
21 already kind of said yes to that. And can we just get
22 you on the record?

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Absolutely. We absolutely
24 support the Intro, Mr. Chair, yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. Alright.

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1
2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And Mrs. Chair, Madam Chair,
3 sorry.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, um. The 2015 report
5 recommended the development of a veteran leadership
6 association comprised of established veteran
7 organizations that could support new businesses. So
8 additionally, the last time we held a hearing on this
9 topic, uh, DVS cited in their testimony that veteran
10 entrepreneurs encountered challenges with starting
11 and growing their business, uh, due to the lack of
12 social, um, capital in the form of networks and
13 mentorships.

14 So, um, and this has always been a problem, you
15 know, in, in, with veterans and, um, getting them
16 mentors and getting them, you know, the wherewithal
17 to, to start businesses. They do have certain, you
18 know, we're going to talk about certain, um, hurdles,
19 but what is the administration's position on
20 development of a veteran leadership program within
21 SBS to enhance veteran participation in City
22 procurement?

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm going to defer to, uh,
24 Deputy Commissioner Gross, or do you want me to just?

25

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EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: If you'd
like.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll start a little bit. So,
we've, we've launched the Veteran Business Leadership
Association this year as far as in April of 2022, we
have launched something which is that vehicle that
was recommended in this report as far as a place
where our veterans can be able to go to receive that
additional support and just, uh, mentorship as they
navigate the system. So, that's something that we
have done and we're so happy that we've been doing
this in partnership with our good friends at MOCS and
SBS. But I'll defer to Executive Deputy Commissioner
Gross to, anything else you want to add on that.

EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes, and
good afternoon, Chairs Holden, Menin, and, um,
Council Member Paladino, and Staff. Uh, we are
thrilled to have the leadership of the Department of
Veteran Services in establishing the VBLA. Uh, we
work very closely together on a, you know, daily,
weekly, monthly basis to support one another and
advance in all of our service delivery. So, SBS is,
um, eager to support the growth and the effectiveness
of the VBLA with DVS's leadership.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, you, you do have mentors,
3 then? Did we, do we, how many do we have that are in
4 the program?

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We have, it's 26 who have
6 engaged with VBLA so far since the launch in April
7 and we have 20 who are moving forward as far as we're
8 doing, offering material assistance to those
9 entrepreneurs as they navigate, uh, different
10 opportunities

11 I, I have to say, uh, keeping, when you think
12 about VBLA, uh, you know, different from the MWBE
13 Leadership Academy that exists in that it's designed
14 to be step one for a veteran entrepreneur, regardless
15 of whatever the path is they desire to take, be it
16 City, uh, procurement opportunities, state
17 procurement opportunities, federal procurement
18 opportunities, or if they're looking for the private
19 sector. So, we just, I just wanted to flag that, Mr.
20 Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, um, and, and we, we
22 brought this up at the last hearing, um, about
23 filling, uh, positions within DVS. And you were, you
24 were saying that you were behind, like most Agencies
25 are, are behind in, um, in creating lines or at least

1 filling those positions. Um, so, do, you know, SBS
2 and DVS have the, the capacity and the resources, um,
3 to expand this program with mentorships and what we
4 just mentioned, uh, leadership advisory program as
5 outlined in my, in the, uh, Intro 476.
6

7 I mean, I, I know you're going to say that you
8 do, but I really want to know like how many positions
9 you still have to fill. Um, a realistic, um, you
10 know, because we talked about you weren't getting
11 the, you, you interviewed already, but you couldn't
12 hire at that time. Has things changed since the last
13 hearing?

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And I want to, I want to,
15 uh, highlight that, that's as far as just speaking of
16 DVS in general where we are, uh, having an authorized
17 strength of 41, having a certain number of vacancies,
18 I believe it was when we last spoke it was at 13.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: 13, right.

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Vacancies. We had, you know,
21 uh, five protected leave and so we, as far as looking
22 at our count, we have been chopping the tree down on
23 that, Mr. Chair, and we're so grateful as far as
24 support from the administration as we've been, you
25 know, steadily getting that green light to hire one

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2 by one as far as doing what we can to get lean, or
3 to, to get our meat back as far as, you know, coming
4 out of the pandemic and trying to get stronger as an
5 Agency.

6 Uh, separate from that, VBLA is something that
7 we're doing, working, um, with a contractor, Mr.
8 Chair. So, it's something where we recognize that we
9 didn't have the resources internally to fully execute
10 it, so it's something where we're relying on a
11 contractor who executes this program for us. And the
12 website for VBLA, just for those, any entrepreneurs
13 who may be looking, it's NYCVBLA.org. So,
14 NYCVBLA.org.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, um, uh, just a few more
16 questions, then I'll turn it over to my Co-Chair. Uh,
17 the 2015 report also recommended that DVS leverage
18 Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, PTACs, and,
19 uh, and state funded small business development
20 centers, SBDC, as, um, a resource for veterans on how
21 to do business with the government. And certainly,
22 everybody needs a course in that, but, um, please
23 explain how the Agencies, uh, coordinate with these
24 centers to help veteran-owned businesses, uh, pursue
25 City contracts.

1
2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm going to defer to my
3 colleague, uh, you know, Policy Analyst Pedro Zapata
4 to start that off, and then, you know, pass over to
5 you if that's okay, Deputy Commissioner Gross. That's
6 alright. You better go.

7 POLICY ANALYST ZAPATA: Alright. Thank you for
8 that question, Mr. Chair, and Madam Chair, and the
9 rest of the Council and Staff. At the present time,
10 through the VBLA, we get inquiries for assistance on
11 anywhere from business ideation to procurement and,
12 uh, contracting. And what we do is, we engage with
13 the veteran owners and veteran-owned businesses and
14 then decide how to best route them.

15 So, currently, we've been routing them to the
16 regional SBS PTAC or Procurement Technical Assistance
17 Center, which is run by our colleagues at SBS where I
18 myself, have a direct line with my counterpart at
19 that office to just, uh, follow up and ensure that
20 our veterans are getting the help they need.

21 We also, uh, refer our veterans to the state
22 Office of General Services when they are looking for
23 state SDVOB certification, or Service-Disabled
24 Veteran Owned Businesses. And for the inquiries on
25 non-government, or non-City contracting, our VBLA

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3 staff handles and works with our, uh, veteran-owned
4 businesses to counsel and advise them through those
5 procurement opportunities.

6 For business development, we refer them directly
7 to the business solution centers where they, uh,
8 normally hold two cohorts of veteran-owned business
9 centered programs, uh, managed by our colleagues at
10 SBS as well.

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Anything to add.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Go ahead, yeah.

13 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes, I would
14 add that in a, in addition to receiving those
15 referrals, you know, on a staff regularly from DVS,
16 we maintain a PTAC, um, intake form on the SBS
17 website and on New York City Business so that any
18 veteran or other business interested in growing
19 through government contracting has an easy way to
20 request PTAC assistance. They share some basic
21 information about their, their entity and what type
22 of support and they receive both email and telephone
23 follow up.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. So, um, this is a,
25 this is a question, I don't know if you, you can
answer it, but, um, I, I think I know your position,

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Commissioner, but what is the City's position on pursuing state authorization to offer veteran-owned businesses the same procurement priorities as MWBEs?

COMMISSIONER HENDON: Mr. Chair, the, there's commitment here to have some sort of material established for our service-disabled veteran owned businesses that are based here in New York. Right now, we're having internal discussions on what that benefit looks like, but it's very, and this isn't just me speaking, this is the stance, is that the commitment is to have an, to have a material benefit for service-disabled veteran-owned businesses that are here in New York City.

Uh, right now we're trying to balance doing something that is of the appropriate magnitude with accounting for ease of execution, with managing the existing policy landscape that Chair Menin had referenced as well. And so, that's where we are. And I want to read, uh, something from the original roadmap, the document from a few years ago.

Said at that time, given the limited goal, the limited, given the limited pool of veteran-owned companies able to do business with the City and the availability of the City certification programs, uh,

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3 and the availability of other City certification
4 programs like MWBE and EBE, a (INAUDIBLE) program for
5 veterans is not recommended at this time. So, this
6 report said given the small number of veterans,
7 nothing is recommended at this time. We're in a
8 different place now in that we want to do something.
9 It's a question of what that something is. Um, so, I
10 just want to be very clear about that, Mr. Chair and
11 Madam Chair.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. Um, so, what
13 coordination assistance does the administration
14 provide to New York City's veteran-owned businesses
15 who are interested in being certified as a service-
16 disabled veteran owned business?

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm going to defer to, uh,
18 to Pedro on that one, Mr. Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You give him the hard
20 questions there.

21 SENIOR POLICY ANALYST ZAPATA: Oh, no, I, we can,
22 we can take it, it's just.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I (INAUDIBLE).

24 SENIOR POLICY ANALYST ZAPATA: sort of similar to
25 what I mentioned earlier, um. We funnel everything to
the Office of General Services over at the state. And

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2 we list all of the requirements and give them a guide
3 for successfully filling out the application. The
4 process is an online application that one has to
5 download, fill out, and sign. So, what we do is we
6 given them all the information in order for them to
7 successfully, uh, complete and submit their forms.
8 And then, I reach out to my colleagues at OGS and
9 check to see if they've received and if there has
10 been any development on those, uh, requests.

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Just want to add to that as
12 far as highlighting the Veteran Business Leadership
13 Association, VBLA, you know, VBLA since it's been
14 stood up has gotten into active, working with our
15 veterans with these applications. You got a great
16 case study from them from Business, where they helped
17 that business obtain that SDVOB certification, obtain
18 their EBE certification here at the City level,
19 obtain the federal employee retention tax credit. Uh,
20 they're currently, they're VASDVOSB certification,
21 federal cert, is currently under review, but it's
22 been submitted, and helped them obtain disadvantaged
23 business enterprise certification with the MTA, just
24 to highlight what the value is that the Association
25 brings to the chair, uh, Mr. Chair.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. Just a few more
3 questions, uh, from my, uh, my side here. According
4 to the DVS website, veteran entrepreneurs who use
5 VetConnectNYC are connected to a DVS care coordinator
6 that can help veterans apply for funding
7 opportunities and training programs at the state and
8 federal level. How many requests for
9 entrepreneurships assistance did DVS receive through
10 VetConnect in 2021?

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Before answering that, Mr.
12 Chair, I just want to get the caveat that, think of
13 DVS as a pizza shop. We either receive orders that
14 come in through the phone, people walk in, folks come
15 to us online, we can get orders through social media.
16 And so, VetConnect is our online way of receiving
17 orders. But it also helps us as a backend as far as
18 our overall database, the united system there, we
19 track things.

20 So, I just want to clarify when we say
21 VetConnect. So, the numbers I'm going to report, this
22 is everyone who's come into the shop, so to speak,
23 sir. So, not just VetConnect but what has come to
24 DVS. Uh, fiscal year '21 we received 25 requests for
25 entrepreneurship assistance from our veterans. Fiscal

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3 year '22 we received 68 requests, uh, for
4 entrepreneurship support. And thus far in FY '23,
5 we're only three and a half months in, we're at 51
6 requests. So, year over year from FY '21 to '22 to
7 '23, it's 25, then 68, and now 51.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. Good. Alright. I'll,
9 I'll turn it back to my Co-Chair, um, Council Member
10 Menin.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you so much, Chair
12 Holden. First of all, I want to recognize my
13 colleagues who've joined, Council Member Joann
14 Ariola, Council Member Sandra Ung, and walking in
15 Council Member Darleen Mealy. Thank you so much for
16 joining us.

17 So, I have a number of questions that I wanted to
18 ask. First, what is the percentage and amount of City
19 contracts that are currently being awarded to
20 veteran-owned businesses?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Madam Chair, I'm going to
22 defer to my colleagues at MOCS on that one.

23 CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER OSORIA: I'm going to have
24 to defer to my colleague, Matt Sullivan, if those
25 numbers are available.

CHAIRPERSON JULIE MENIN: Come on up. Come on up.

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1
2 DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF SULLIVAN: Sorry. Um, I
3 don't think we have that number available now but
4 that's something that we can look to.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yeah, could you please get it
6 to both Committees so we could see. I'm really
7 interested in this percentage, so we can drill down
8 on, on how much money is being awarded to our
9 veteran-owned businesses.

10 Secondly, how would the administration's, uh,
11 proposed PEG affect DVS? And particularly, and I was
12 concerned about some of the comments that came from,
13 um, Chair Holden about vacancies in the Agency. In
14 regards to the subject of this hearing which is
15 obviously supporting veteran-own small businesses,
16 how would the proposed PEG affect those services?

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: In the context of this for
18 us, the VBLA, as I mentioned, it's a, it's a, we have
19 a contractor who runs that effort as far as VBLA. And
20 so, for us, you know, any reduction in general,
21 reduces our ability to do things like that as far as
22 what we do with our OTPS, or Other Than Personnel
23 Services funding, Madam Chair.

24 Um, we are doing what we can as all are in this
25 administration right now, to, to be as innovative as

1 we can and to, to be efficient and still meet
2 mission. In other words, it's a goal for us to
3 continue to invest in this work. We see the value of
4 it, even with the uptick in veterans whom we're
5 identifying, to the number of veterans reaching out
6 just for support. It's all about having a
7 relationship with our people, Madam Chairman. And,
8 uh, that relationship brings more of our brothers and
9 sisters out of the shadows as veterans so we may help
10 them.
11

12 And so, this is something that PEG or no PEG, you
13 will still see VBLA being executed. You'll still see
14 us being very much on the offense with engaging our
15 veteran entrepreneurs.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Can you walk us through
17 the resources that exist for a veteran to obtain
18 assistance in obtaining public contracts? So,
19 specifically, I'm interested in the exact outreach.
20 Like, one of the things that we saw a couple months
21 ago in a hearing our Committee did on MWBEs is that
22 so many MWBEs were simply not aware of the
23 opportunities. So, I'm really interested in what kind
24 of outreach you're doing, what kind of events, what
25 materials are you disseminating, in how many

1
2 different languages? What overall are the respective
3 Agencies spending on outreach, if you could get? And
4 if you don't have that, I would ask that that get to
5 both of our Committees.

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And forgive me, I don't have
7 the, like the exact spend for us. I can say that, uh,
8 a lot of the work for us is identify the vet first.
9 Once we find out that veteran, that veteran-owned
10 business, then it's about the outreach. So, for us,
11 the identification takes the form of what we see in
12 the map. And the map is a result of, uh, different
13 ways that we receive these veterans who are in New
14 York City. It's looking at the list of service-
15 disabled veteran owned businesses for the state. It's
16 looking at the list of businesses that our friends at
17 MOCS receive through PASSPort where veterans self-
18 identify.

19 It's looking at, the VA has its own VetBiz. VA
20 has its own, uh, VetBiz. VA has VetBez, that's why
21 our VetBiz is actually modeled after that, looking at
22 those who are in New York City who are certified by
23 the VA. And it's those who self-identify as far as
24 just different avenues through which we try to
25 identify these folks. I mentioned that it was at 308

1 right now on the map, which is nyc.gov/vetbiznyc is
2 our map. That's where it's located.
3

4 Um, we're in the process of updating it so that
5 it'll be nearly 400 by the end of the week as far as
6 more that we've gotten through these means, Madam
7 Chair. And so, once we get them, then there's a
8 constant, you know, there's us messaging to that
9 explicit group on, "Hey, here is what's available to
10 you." That's to them. There's what we do via social
11 media and via our website and via the, uh, the
12 newsletter to more broadly let veterans and veteran
13 entrepreneurs know, here's what we've got available.
14 Please take advantage of this and what our friends at
15 our other Agencies including SBS have to offer.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And so, the, the approximately
17 300, um, veteran-owned businesses that are on this
18 online site, are they then being marketed to
19 businesses, larger corporate businesses in the City,
20 not for profits, because there's so many economic
21 opportunities not just City contracts, but there are
22 other economic opportunities. What is the City doing
23 to connect these businesses? Is one question.

24 And then the other question I have is, so you
25 mentioned there are 976 veteran-owned businesses. How

1 do we get to the other approximately 600? Because
2 you're basically have three, a third of these
3 businesses on the online portal. What are we doing
4 about the other 600 businesses and how are we
5 reaching them?
6

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, this question speaks to
8 VBLA and VetBizNYC. It goes together in that there's
9 a larger campaign for us of, when we talk to someone
10 who's a large corporate or major nonprofit, or major
11 spender who could these folks for procurement, it's
12 hire a vet. It's help a vet. It's contract with a
13 vet. And so, no one can every say, "I don't know
14 where to find a veteran-owned business." No, go to
15 VetBizNYC and you've got that. So, that's what we're
16 trying to do as far as getting the word out to a lot
17 of the larger players, so they know where our people
18 are.

19 I mentioned before that VBLA, one of the key
20 reasons it's formed is to not just provide technical
21 assistance, but to be a place where we can be able to
22 say, "Hey, you know, this large corporation wants to
23 do business with a veteran. Let's reach out and talk
24 to VBLA and see if they can help us identify someone
25 and make that connection." Like, the larger goal for

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1
2 them is to not just provide the assistance, but to be
3 the buttonhole for which, when a major corporate or
4 any small business wants to do business with a
5 veteran, they can engage with our VBLA and they can
6 tie them in to these different entrepreneurs who are
7 on that site.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Like, for example, the
9 New York City Partnership, which represents the
10 largest 300 businesses in the City, are you all
11 reaching out to them to see? Can they, for example,
12 if you have a, a veteran-owned caterer, that they
13 could help to promote that business locally to the
14 300 large businesses in the City. I guess I'm very
15 interested in, in, in that opportunity for these
16 small businesses.

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: (INAUDIBLE) I was just
18 talking with Deputy Commissioner, uh, Paul Vallone
19 from our team has taken point with that. We had a
20 conversation about this specifically as far as
21 literally mentioning partnership. And so, one of the
22 roles that Deputy Commissioner Vallone will be, uh,
23 helping us with is this effort as far as getting in
24 front of these major entities and stressing hire a
25 vet, help a vet, contract with a vet, Madam Chair.

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CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Could we then get an, an
update from you as, as the, if you've started on
that? And as those efforts continue can you please
get back our Committees specifically on that, cause
I'd love to see some measurable results if we can get
some of the large businesses in the City to then help
to contract with some of these veteran-owned small
businesses? And, and while you're coming up, I just
want to recognize our colleague, Council Member
Shekhar Krishnan has joined us. Oh, okay. Okay, he's
going to swear, he's going to swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL PAULENOFF: Yeah. Got to swear
you in.

CHAIRPERSON MENIN: He was. He had his hand
raised. Yeah.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL PAULENOFF: I don't think your
name was on the record, Sir. Deputy Commissioner
Vallone, uh, would you please raise your right hand?
Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole
truth, and nothing but the truth before this
Committee today and respond honestly to Council
Member questions?

VALLONE: Yes, I do and it's good to see everyone,
Chairs Holden, Chair Menin. Uh, what the Commissioner

1 just said was something that I took from that side of
2 the aisle to bring here is that inter-Agency
3 cooperation. This is a perfect hearing for that. You
4 know, how can SBS and DVS move forward with this
5 topic of veteran-owned businesses. So, the VBLA
6 program that the Commissioner has been discussing,
7 and with SBS's testimony, it is the, at the baby
8 steps, the growth of that.

10 So, today is a good way to highlight that and
11 talk about that. So, when I joined, uh, DVS, it was
12 to reach out to the other Agencies and say, "Hey, we
13 are the smallest Agency in the City of New York. We
14 need your help." As one of the things we always
15 testify, and Chair Holden's always fighting to get us
16 more resources, one of those areas is we can't tackle
17 all of this altogether. So, partnerships with SBS is
18 critical.

19 So, to have hearings like this to, to talk about
20 what's been doing and the great work that Ellen and
21 Pedro have been doing with the Commissioner to work
22 with the VBLA, to work with the Veterans Committee to
23 identify the needs with new small business and
24 veterans, um, has really been the goal over the last
25 year since we've, we've tackled this. So, this is,

1 this is what you're seeing today is that joint effort
2 to this exact topic.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. So, I'm just going to
5 make a recommendation that you reach out to the
6 Partnership because, again, I think that would be a
7 really important opportunity economically for these
8 businesses. I'm just going to ask one more question,
9 and then I want to turn it over to my colleagues. So,
10 the NYU Veterans Future Lab released a report that
11 found that the top three challenges for veteran
12 entrepreneurs were marketing, personal finances, and
13 lack of initial capital. What are you all doing to
14 address those three buckets?

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think marketing is being
16 amplified with the, with the VBLA as far as getting
17 them on the map so then, you know, it's not just that
18 assistance, but it's really Deputy Commissioner
19 Vallone and others having those discussions with the
20 Partnership and other stakeholders to get folks to
21 pay attention to our people and do business with
22 them.

23 Um, as far as personal finances, it's, and please
24 help me out with this one, Deputy Commissioner Gross,
25 a lot of it is making sure that our veterans who have

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1 access to capital needs noted time with SBS to take
2 advantage of whatever offerings they have on the
3 financial side for those, uh, veteran entrepreneurs.
4 And then, the last one you said, was lack of, what
5 was it again?
6

7 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Uh, capital.

8 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Lack of, say it again?

9 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Capital, access to capital,
10 access to capital.

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Forgive me. Let me, let me,
12 let me get this right. Lack of access to capital is
13 SBS. I'm so sorry about that. Personal finance is.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Personal finances.

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Uh, personal finance for us,
16 it's, as far as City, it's tying in with DCWP and
17 making sure that those who need it, can receive help
18 from your, you know, former organization and the
19 resources they provide. Separately, uh, something
20 that we have been in talks with that we're looking to
21 roll out very, very soon, is having a personal
22 financial advisor on VetConnectNYC. We used to have
23 one. We were looking to get that back. That was
24 something that we used to, you know, we had a session
25 recently where this came out as far as financial

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1 assistance being something that our veterans are
2 struggling with and just personal finances and
3 management of them. And so, we're looking at having a
4 financial advisor back on our VetConnectNYC platform,
5 Madam Chair.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Uh, two recommendations
8 there, one is on, um, financial resources, is
9 connecting with my old Agency, DCWP, which operates
10 30 financial empowerment centers. I think connecting
11 the veteran-owned businesses directly to one of these
12 financial counselors at one of the financial
13 empowerment centers would be great, love to see you
14 do that.

15 And secondly, NYC and Co, I think, a lot of times
16 people forget that we have this, uh, you know,
17 incredible marketing arm for the City and we should
18 be utilizing their marketing budget and doing a
19 partnership with them to help to promote veteran-
20 owned small businesses. You've got domestic tourists
21 coming from all around the country, many of whom are
22 veterans, and I think they could do a really
23 innovative promotion. So, I'd love to see if you
24 could do some type of partnership there.
25

1 So, that is it. I'm going to turn it over to my
2
3 colleagues. Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Thank you so much for those
5 suggestions, Madam Chair.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: There you go. Hi,
7 everybody. And thank you very much. Uh, I, Council
8 Member Menin really covered a lot of my questions,
9 but I just want to go over just a couple of things.
10 Uh, we again keep hearing about online and online.
11 We've covered this in other, other meetings. Uh, my
12 curiosity lies in the fact that there's, uh, 235,000
13 veterans living in New York City. Out of, uh, 235,000
14 veterans living in New York City, there's only 976
15 businesses on a broad scale. We have 300 known, I'm
16 just jotting what you guys wrote and read back to us.

17 Uh, I would like this broken down a little bit if
18 you could, for me, please. Um, what exactly is the
19 budget for DVS? And how much of that budget is spent
20 on advertising to let the veterans out there living
21 in the City, what's available to them? Because you've
22 got some great stuff going on and they need to know
23 on a much broader scale, what we can do to help them.

24 The Veteran Connect, uh, I see here in '22, the
25 number was 68. Does that mean 68 physical people

1 applied for this or is that percentage? I might have
2 missed it when you were speaking.
3

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Thank you so much for all of
5 these questions, too. Uh, I'm so glad you asked about
6 the numbers. As far as the, the VetConnect number,
7 that was 68 people. So, it was 25 in FY '21 as far as
8 veterans, folks who reached out to DVS needing
9 entrepreneurship support. So, it's, it's 25 in FY
10 '21, it's 68 in FY '22. So far in the first three
11 months of FY '23, we're at 51. So, that's physical
12 people reaching out.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Okay. So, out of all
14 these veterans, we had only 68 people reach out in
15 2022? Does that number sound low to anybody else
16 other than myself? I mean, that sounds pretty
17 pathetic. So, what that tells me is that we're not
18 reaching our veterans the way we should be.

19 We have a tremendous amount of veterans here that
20 need a tremendous amount of help. And they need work.
21 And you yourself said it, and we all know it, they
22 are probably the best trained people we have out
23 there, and they can service any major corporation as
24 well as start-ups, businesses of their own. So, my
25 question, like Julie's, uh, remains, how much of this

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1 are they actually seeing out of the City itself, for
2 City contracts? Uh, we have, what'd we say here, the
3 number of, you broke it down. 232 businesses, 41%
4 were professional, 22% were construction, trade was
5 11%, I believe you said. And manufacturing was 5%. Is
6 that number based upon 976? Or is that number, uh,
7 based?
8

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, the, uh, a couple of
10 things. I want to go through the numbers from top to
11 bottom.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Sure, sure.

13 COMMISSIONER HENDON: The numbers in this report
14 have a lot of issues with them, too. So, when we
15 start with the, the, they started with 235,000
16 veterans in New York City in 2014 and then took
17 national averages for everything else.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And so, the assumptions they
20 used were based on, alright, 235,000 and so what
21 percentage of that, based on national numbers are,
22 uh, employed, unemployed, or retired? And then after
23 the employed number, what percentage of that would be
24 business owners? And then of that number, what
25

1 percentage would be able to, would go into trades,
2 that would do business with the City?
3

4 In other words, these numbers were off as far as
5 where they landed, and this number got us to about,
6 uh, I think it's, it was more than, it was 15,400
7 veteran-owned businesses mentioned in this. And so,
8 the assumptions just weren't in line, first off,
9 Madam Council Member, we look at, we know that there
10 161 service-disabled veteran owned businesses in the
11 five Boroughs. We know that the percentage of, of, of
12 those of us who have disability ratings is 16.5%. so,
13 that's how we got the 976 number. That's how we got
14 that as far as the larger market for us.

15 We have 308 businesses on the map. And you're
16 right, out of those 308, 232 have provided us with
17 these NAICS codes, so the North American Industry
18 Classification System codes. And so, from that,
19 that's where we got those numbers where it was, and
20 you're right, I just want to clarify one piece of it.
21 It was 41% professional, scientific, and technical
22 services, 22% construction, 11% trade, 7%
23 manufacturing, and 5% was education, healthcare, and
24 social assistance.
25

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1
2 Um, as far as us, numbers wise, budget for DVS is
3 approximately \$6.1 million, about \$4.1 million is
4 personnel. The other \$2 million is our Other Than
5 Personnel piece of it. And so, it's that we have a
6 budget of \$2 million that we balance for these
7 things. Um, yeah.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER VALLONE: Council Member
9 Paladino, and just like yourself, and, it's good to
10 see you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good to see you, too,
12 Paul.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER VALLONE: Not down the block.
14 Just, and just like Chair Menin said also, you know,
15 when we spoke to the delegation, the Commissioner and
16 I, and when Chair Holden brings us in and we speak,
17 you know, how we can expand this conversation is with
18 every legislator and every Committee that they're on
19 and every legislation and every budget, you ask
20 yourself the question, where are veterans within that
21 conversation?

22 So, just like Chair Menin mentioned about, um,
23 New York and Company, and Fred Dixon, the CEO of our
24 EDC, you know, where is veterans within that
25 conversation? We're looking, and this is something

1 new to partner with every Agency. Like, if the
2 largest demographic of veterans is seniors, where is
3 DFTA with that, within that conversation and with how
4 many veterans they're helping within DFTA and working
5 within DVS?
6

7 So, with us being the smallest Agency, the, the,
8 the part that would help tremendously would be those
9 partnerships. And like SBS at the table with us
10 today, um, that's starting to happen. It's going to
11 take some time, but that's starting to happen. And
12 then we can tap into those additional ways to reach
13 more veterans, just like this conversation.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Because these.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER VALLONE: you're right. you're
16 right in highlighting that.

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: and I want to, I want to add
18 some, uh, you know, uh, Council Member. So, it's also
19 this larger issue that hovers all of this is veteran
20 self-identification.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: That's true.

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That's where it is, really.
23 And it's just, when I mentioned the, the national
24 level, the federal data is, it's 33.1% of all
25 veterans eligible for VA healthcare utilize it and

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1 the VA is the second largest, uh, organization in all
2 of the government, second only to the Defense
3 Department. \$300 billion budget, here it is. They've
4 only identified 33.1.

5 we're working and doing everything we can and
6 working with all partners including everyone in this
7 room, including yourself and the other, uh, Members,
8 to try to, to slay the beast here. And so, we're
9 working on it. And for us to be at 308 out of 976,
10 and by the end of this week, we'll have uploaded,
11 we'll be the closer to 400 out of 976. We're trying
12 to, to, to tackle this, but yeah. I, I completely
13 understand. Did I fully answer all of your points? I
14 want to make sure that I answered every question you
15 had?
16

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Yeah, I, I, I'm just
18 curious, how do the vets find out about what you have
19 to offer? I mean, there's so much out there. Even we
20 said, uh, in another Committee meeting, you know,
21 there's a lot of job seekers out there. Um, do any of
22 these veterans fit, uh, some of these City jobs? A
23 lot of these Agencies are short on people. Uh, the
24 City is really looking to make hires. Do any of our
25 veterans fall into that category that they could be

1 hired by the City in a different, uh, commissions
2 that are? They're, they're, they're short on help.

3 DOT told me yesterday, they're down, I can't
4 believe how many. Sanitation workers are down. I
5 mean, we have, we have, we need people to work in the
6 City. Can any of our veterans qualify for any of
7 that? I know they're an ageing population, of course,
8 but I'm just wondering at what point and where can
9 we, as City, uh, workers, put them maybe?

10 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think the center, the
11 center of gravity to that comment, and I just do want
12 to flag when you said that we're aging. 71% of our
13 veterans are 55 or older in the City. So, I do want
14 to call that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: That's true.

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: But it's, right now, it's
17 about the word of mouth or the trusted advisor. So,
18 for us in the context of what we've been doing with
19 businesses, you know, we had a kickoff meeting when
20 we started this initiative, uh, during COVID where we
21 had different trusted advisors or folks who were, you
22 know, network leaders, or network hub leaders we
23 called them, for our businesses. We got them all
24
25

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3 together for a meeting to discuss what we wanted to
4 do to try to help our folks.

5 And I've found that it's been that word-of-mouth
6 aspect of it as far as how veterans find out about
7 things. And what's, what devils us there is if I'm
8 not in the tribe at all, I won't hear anything at
9 all.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: True.

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And that's the problem. So,
12 that's the real, it's how do we get the eyeballs, the
13 ears of that man or woman who took the uniform and is
14 like, "I'm not, I'm not acknowledging this at all."
15 You know, and that's, but we want to help you and
16 make sure you know what's available to us. I feel
17 like that's the, that's the area. It's, it's the what
18 that person who is in the dark is the one that is the
19 hardest for us. For the others, if they're already
20 self-identified, they're going to find out in some
21 way, shape, or form. I'll just, yeah, sorry.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: There's so few that
23 self-identify?

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Relative to, yes, yeah. I
25 mean, in the City, the number, it's 24.6% is where

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1 we're at in the City. So, you see me, there are three
2 others you don't see.
3

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Yeah.

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: who have served. And so,
6 that's, that's where it is. It's trying to get beyond
7 just the, we're dealing with the self-identified
8 bucket as far as the veterans on this map, for these
9 businesses. It's breaking through to the others and
10 trying to, to do that and, and we're hoping that our
11 performance and that folks see good things come from
12 this and they would come into the fold.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: At our, um, veterans
14 centers, now I know so many have closed, the American
15 Legion Halls have closed. The VFWs have closed. Where
16 can they go, uh, if they don't do online, those two
17 that stand behind you that are invisible, and I
18 understand that, uh, where do they go? Where, where
19 do they?

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm going to. I, I think
21 she's got to get sworn in or you already were sworn
22 in, right? I'm going to defer to Assistant
23 Commissioner Ellen Greeley on this question.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Yes, thank you.

25 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Hi, Council Member. Um, just wanted to give you the heads up at the onset of the, um, pandemic, um, I put together a fairly comprehensive list of 160 veteran service organizations including the American Legions, Veteran, um, uh, the, uh, VVAs, um, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, et cetera, et cetera. The list really formed our basis for reaching out to all the American Legions and Veteran of Foreign Wars and the other associated organizations.

We sent out a general letter, one was offering them masks, um, and cleaning supplies. Uh, after that, we also told them about, um, I, um, I raised, uh, \$25,000, uh, from five different organizations to provide \$1,133 to 22 veteran service organizations that also were strapped with running short of cash because they generally contract out, um, and host, um, uh, uh, events for the general community as well as for their members. That's how a lot of them make their money and that they survive. They themselves are really catering facilities or at least venues for catering facilities in the local communities.

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1
2 So, we were able to do that. Um, we also gave out
3 another 35 Home Depot card gift certificates to the
4 VSOs and they, uh, and the, um, uh, VSOs out there.

5 Um, so, uh, so we've had, uh, we've had a
6 relationship going with a lot of the VSOs. Some of
7 them come to us because they do, it's a great source
8 for us to amplify our messages through them and so we
9 do write them letters. Actually, we, we send it
10 through snail mail because not a whole lot of these
11 organizations are open on a consistent basis.

12 Um, so we do have relationships with these
13 organizations.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: There's no help centers,
15 though?

16 COMMISSIONER GREELEY: I'm sorry?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: No help centers? There's
18 no help centers, like designated areas where veterans
19 can go in the different Boroughs, who that can go in
20 and get help?

21 COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Well, we do have
22 (CROSSTALK) GCS does have veteran resource centers
23 structured in every, in each Borough. Uh, and we do
24 have, uh, regular posted hours that do, that, that
25 veterans can come to. Um, part of it is the

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1
2 amplification. It's, you know, one, one source of it
3 again, where a lot of things are electronic, but one
4 source of it is really using our VSOs to amplify our
5 messages, uh, and we have, we have done that.

6 I, I do get requests to go out and visit with the
7 VSOs actually.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Thank you.

9 COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Uh, pretty, uh, pretty
10 regularly.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Thank you for your time.

12 Thanks.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, just to, um, to follow
14 up on Council Member Paladino. Are those veteran
15 resource centers open? Because many of them were shut
16 down during the pandemic. Some of them, all of them.
17 Every, every, all the five Boroughs?

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: They're open, they're all
19 open now. Yes, Mr. Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We're going to, uh, I want
22 to make sure we got the right website, but it's all
23 on, it, they're open on our website also. Um, yes, so
24 there is one at Queens Borough Hall. There's one at,
25 in the Bronx at an HRA site on Garrison Avenue. We

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1 got to get that. It's on the website. I want to find
2 it so I can say it for folks. Uh, we have one is
3 Staten Island, um, at a Department of Probation site,
4 there in Staten Island. We have one, uh, in Chapel
5 Street in downtown Brooklyn.
6

7 COMMISSIONER HOLDEN: And they're open nine to
8 five, or what, what's the hours cause?

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We, we have the hours.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You can say they're open, but
11 they're only.

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, we have the, we have
13 the hours posted as far as when, when they're open,
14 uh, Mr. Chair. But we'll, we'll get the hours out
15 there. Uh, at a minimum it's 10 hours per week. At a
16 minimum, they're open, but as we're hiring and
17 getting our strength back so to speak, we see
18 ourselves having these things open each of the days
19 of the week. So, uh, I'm looking for it right now so
20 we can make sure that folks here have that
21 information about our VRCs, but they are back.

22 (CROSSTALK).

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, but can we get evening
24 hours? This is the kind of thing that we have to look
25 at, like we, all of them should be consistent, let's

1 say nine to five and then alternate maybe one night a
2 week for the other, you know, the other ones. But,
3 um, I, I just want to again, just, um, piggyback on,
4 um, Council Member Paladino's questions. The City is
5 always great on programs. But they're not great on
6 telling people what programs are available. And it's
7 not, you know, that, that's always the case. And I
8 always say, especially with smaller Agencies like
9 yours, um, we have to get creative on outreach.
10

11 So, let, I'll give you an example. Um, there were
12 two billboards in my area that were peeling. They
13 weren't, they weren't, uh, covered with graffiti.
14 They were in a, you know, in a commercial district.
15 So, I, I went to the billboard company, and I said,
16 "This is an embarrassment, you know. These, this is
17 in terrible condition, you know. Can you put
18 something else on there?" So, guess what they put up?
19 They put up recruitment posters, um, for the Army.
20 Two years, two and half years ago, they're still up.

21 Now, this is free advertising space because what
22 I do if these companies are not maintaining their
23 billboards, we put a complaint in against them that,
24 you know, it's peeling and they were littering, you
25 know, the paper is coming down off the billboards.

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1 But even on, on bus stops, uh, bus shelters, um, uh,
2 even, even, you know, talking to utilities to try to
3 piggyback on some of their mailings to put in
4 something about DVS the services, how you, they could
5 reach out to people and get, you know, get veterans
6 to sign up.

7
8 I'm sure companies would actually love to do
9 that. The fact that the recruitment posters are still
10 up over two and half years ago, tells you that
11 they're willing to do something to, you know, in, in
12 recruiting, but we should get, you know, after the,
13 the veteran leaves the service, we should try to help
14 them. So, we can do some create.

15 I'd like to work with you because I, I come from
16 advertising background, and I do have some ideas
17 because I'm seeing empty billboards. I'm seeing, you
18 know, uh, utility bills which I think we could
19 piggyback. And I'm sure the utility companies would,
20 would be glad to do that and they would advertise
21 that and they would tell, you know, what a great job
22 they're doing in helping veterans. So, we need to
23 access that if, if you have ideas, I, I'd like to sit
24 with you and when we meet again. I have some ideas
25 and I'll, I'll, I will talk to the utilities and see

1 if they're interested in, you know, putting some of
2 your information out there. But thank you, um, uh,
3 Council Member Paladino.
4

5 I want to call on, uh, Council Member Ariola. You
6 have some questions?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Commissioner, thank you.
8 Good to see you again. So, I want to talk about the
9 Queens location because that was, um, opened by my
10 predecessor, Eric Ulrich when he was Chair of the
11 Veterans Committee. It's very important to us and I,
12 I looked just now and I noticed that there was
13 recently a forum that was held via Zoom and I don't
14 know about the other elected officials at this table
15 from Queens, but I was not notified that that was
16 happening.

17 I also quickly but cannot find the hours. I can
18 find the, who's running it, the email address and,
19 and some phone numbers but not the hours that they're
20 operational. So, I guess, I, I've been hearing a lot
21 of numbers talked about and I would like to know, and
22 you, you may not have it today, but I just would like
23 to know, how many veterans are utilizing this Office
24 and we are helping through this Office? Because it
25 says we have, we have nearly 59,000 veterans in

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1 Queens. So, I'd like to know how many veterans are
2 utilizing that and if the number is low, how can we
3 help to make sure more veterans now about it so they
4 can get help?
5

6 As far as the, the programs for small businesses,
7 I know that you're talking about a demographic that's
8 55 years and older, but there are younger veterans
9 that were in more recent conflicts that do not join
10 the American Legion, or the, or the, you know, or
11 their VFW. So, how are you reaching out to that
12 demographic who may be homeless, who may in shelter,
13 and not part of a larger umbrella organization where
14 they would get messaging?

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, the, uh, I'll just take
16 it piece by piece. The, as far as the veteran
17 resource centers, and forgive me for not having it at
18 first, it's, we're getting ALST for this Council
19 Member

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And everyone. But it's on
22 our homepage, the contact tab and then there's
23 veteran resource centers and then it lists the
24 address for each and the hours, um, for each of the,
25 of our veteran resource centers. So, that's

1 available. We'll make sure that we like to have
2 aliases, you know, I, I think we've put in the
3 ticket, as far as nyc.gov/vetresources or vet
4 resource centers. It's not up yet. But just so you
5 have one place to tell people, "Hey, go here so you
6 can see this stuff." That's one.

8 Um, as far as the numbers that utilize the VRC
9 offices.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: But, but how does a
11 regular veteran know that, if they're just going to
12 the website for the Queens Office? I think that's
13 just, maybe that'd be a little more difficult because
14 then they have to go to the main page to then get to,
15 so that, that's a lot of steps for somebody that may
16 not have access to computers, maybe they're using the
17 library for, for a computer to find out.

18 So, I think we have to make it a lot more
19 accessible, especially to our younger veterans who
20 are looking to go into business. Our older veterans
21 are looking for medical services and, and, you know,
22 retirement services, and, and, you know, things like
23 that. But we have some young veterans that are lost
24 right now because they came out of, of service and
25 felt like there was no where for them to go.

1
2 Now, we have VetConnect. We have it. It's a great
3 program. But so, now we have to work together to make
4 sure that this particular demographic, the under 55,
5 knows about it because they're the one's who are
6 going to want to go into business. They're going to
7 want to build their family. So, that.

8 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, there's.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: That, how are we reaching
10 them?

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I want, I want to start and
12 then I'll, I'll pass to you, uh, um, so, one of piece
13 of this, the deeper issue that you're, you're
14 touching right now, uh, Madam Council Woman is it's
15 the dead in the gap. There's this period after
16 someone leave out, leaves the service where if we
17 don't put hands on him or her, then they will just
18 stay in the shadows and not identify again. And
19 that's really that, that, that, that year, 18 months
20 after service. If no one has really reached out to
21 them through their identity as a veteran, they are
22 often walk away from this and not put this back on.

23 And so, for us, a way of triaging that is
24 something that, that Ellen leads, is our ETS
25 sponsorship program, where we're trying to make sure

1 we get hands on these different veterans who are
2 coming out and coming to New York City and pairing
3 them with, you know, older veterans who are already
4 here.
5

6 If you think about it, when you're in the
7 military, every time you change duty stations, you're
8 paired with a sponsor. We want to take them same
9 model for folks when they transition out of the
10 service. And just, you know, my goodness, a few weeks
11 ago, I think two weeks ago, two, three weeks ago, we
12 started receiving information from the Defense
13 Department after two years of work, where now we're
14 receiving the contact information, the DD214s for
15 those service members as they're getting out and
16 coming to New York City. And so, that's one way we're
17 strategically trying to triage this. So, it's not an
18 issue anymore. You know, that, that's a longer-term
19 thing.

20 As far as today, and I guess I'll start this and
21 Ellen will finish it, when it comes to, we work with
22 our legacy VSOs, our legacy Veteran Service
23 Organizations, and our non-legacy, or the newer ones
24 like the Team Rubicons, the Team RWBs, um, the
25 Mission Continues, Travis Manion Foundations of the

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1 World, we work with those as all. And for us, right
2 now, it's been the model of reaching out to the
3 leaders of veteran entrepreneurial networks in the
4 City to make sure that they know about us and that
5 they can wind up having that connection to that
6 veteran so that they can then connect with us.

7
8 Just naming a few of the groups that we do tie in
9 with and we have relationships with, that have a lot
10 of those young veteran entrepreneurs you're speaking
11 of, you know, uh, Bunker Labs, uh, specifically the
12 northeastern region including Bunker Labs New York
13 City, the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum, National
14 Security Innovation Network, the New York State
15 Veterans Chamber of Commerce, the New York Veteran
16 Owned Business Association, uh, NYU's Veterans Future
17 Lab, the Small Business Administration, Small
18 Business Development Corporation, Veterans Business
19 Outreach Centers, Jackson Drysdale Veteran Incubator,
20 the New Jersey Veterans Chamber of Commerce, the
21 Queens Chamber of Commerce, um.

22 Um, and then as far as government entities, of
23 course we have our friends at MOCS, our friends at
24 SBS, our friends at the state from the Office that
25 runs the SDVOB division there from, uh, OGS. Um, and

1 our procurement technical assistant centers. And so,
2 we've been trying to get to them, say, "Hey, look,
3 make sure folks know about us." Because it's not just
4 on the business side, it's what can we do to be right
5 by you in all aspects of your veteran identity?
6

7 So, we, we can always do more. We're trying. I
8 just want to be clear about that, but we, this is
9 where we are with this now. I take your point about
10 us needing to be more specific about trying to market
11 all these things so people know about the services we
12 have, and that's something we're, we're constantly
13 working on.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: And it's really something
15 you can utilize any one of us for. We're happy to do
16 it. We're happy to promote any type of Zoom meeting
17 that you're having, any type of, of, of, of health
18 fair, any type of job fair. We're willing to do that,
19 and we have a very large reach. So, you know, I, I,
20 especially, and I, and I speak for Queens but for the
21 five Boroughs, any, any seated Council Member would
22 be happy to do that. And, um, and the fact that none
23 of us from Queens knew about that particular, uh,
24 Zoom, we could have maybe gotten 50 more veterans to,
25 to, um, to benefit from it.

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1
2 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: If I could, if I could just
3 ask then that you make sure you're working directly
4 with the Council Member's Office and every Council
5 Member so that, the, we can each be helping to market
6 and promote in our own district.

7 And just to make sure that we hear from everyone
8 and then I can come back on second round.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Um, Council Member Mealy, and
11 then followed by Council Member Ung. And then we'll
12 come back, Council Member Ariola for second round.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Okay?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: HI. Thank you. I, one thing
16 I keep hearing, you're a small organization. I hope
17 we can start getting it as a big organization cause
18 the same as you said, um, about their, um, we should
19 be talking at the budget, I think my colleague
20 Vallone said that, at the budget table, about tell me
21 where you put your money to show me where your
22 passion is, and that's the veterans and the seniors.
23 He brought it up. Excellent.

24 So, I'm looking forward to you all becoming
25 bigger because this population needs so much and I'm

1 not going to go over what my colleague said, but it
2 is a demographic that is homeless and some of them
3 have mental illness. What are you doing in regards to
4 those individuals that, if they had something stable,
5 they may can be at that veterans' table? How are you
6 doing with their permits with them selling on the
7 streets? That's what's coming into my Office. Where
8 they're not opening up, a majority of these veterans
9 have a permit, but they can't work. The police are
10 still harassing them with their permits. With others
11 they do not, so, could you address that right quick?

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: SO, for the permits, that's
13 really, and I, I want to acknowledge, I know we have
14 some, and I'm assuming he will speak later, Robert
15 Beck would be, Beck, Belkweber (SP?), who is here is
16 also who's, uh, a representative for our veteran
17 street vendors. I know he said he's going to be on
18 later. Um, a lot of it comes back to.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Love to talk to him.

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, it's, it's, it's, and,
21 it's, for us, this isn't our area as far as having
22 jurisdiction over these permits, but it's working
23 with our partners at, uh, DCWP, our partners at the
24 Police Department to make sure that our veterans that
25

1 the, earned their privileges they have, from being a
2 service disabled street vendor, something conferred
3 to them by the state dating back to the Civil War
4 days, that that is still honored. And that's its own
5 area just as far as that one.

6
7 On the mental health piece, for, I want to defer
8 to Ellen on mental health. I want to start by saying
9 with homelessness, the last point in time count was
10 at 625 veterans. The most recent one which is, uh, it
11 was 4,677 in 2011. It's 625 as far as the 2021 count.
12 620 in the system, five street homeless. Where we are
13 with this group is working to, you know, for those
14 who are in the system right now, the 625, it's mental
15 health and a need for supportive housing for many of
16 those, uh, folks or more than half of them.

17 And so, that's something where we've been in
18 active talks with our friends at the Department of
19 Homeless Services, uh, and HRA, uh, about what can we
20 do here to help facilitate more of these folks going
21 into supportive housing. And this is also something
22 that ties with, uh, you know, uh, great partners who
23 build supportive housing for veterans through the
24 Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative.

1
2 So, when we think about what you were mentioning
3 as far as the homeless veterans, and the mental
4 health, that nexus is what can we do to get out
5 brothers and sisters who need supportive housing,
6 supportive housing? That's something that we work on
7 actively. And I want to defer to Ellen on anything
8 else on the mental health side of this.

9 COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Yes. Yeah, so, uh.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Um, you kind of went over,
11 over that enough. Cause I want to get a, two more
12 questions in.

13 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah,
14 yeah.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you, but, at a later
16 date, I would love to.

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes, at the last hearing,
19 um, you said, uh, stated that they have not offered
20 the fast track, um, entrepreneurship boot camp for
21 veterans in recent years due to the low enrollment.
22 Has SBS explored resuming these, um, boot camps?

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm going to defer to, uh,
24 Executive Deputy Commissioner Gross on that, for the
25 fast track.

1
2 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you
3 for the question, Council Member Mealy. So, we do
4 provide fast track, uh, boot camps, those courses, on
5 a regular basis and we advertise for various
6 populations. So, we have fast track, um, cohorts for
7 women entrepreneurs, fast track cohort for veteran
8 entrepreneurs. We're trying to focus on barriers that
9 are, um, that are specific to unique population in
10 the City. and then hire instructors and develop
11 cohorts to support them.

12 If we have folks who apply, but not enough to
13 form a cohort, then we connect them to other cohorts
14 that are ongoing. So, if we had a veteran who had a
15 business that was existing, and you know, but we
16 didn't have enough to form a cohort, we look for
17 about 35 to start a cohort, because we always have
18 attrition in the program, and it's part of the design
19 of this curriculum which happens over ten weeks that
20 they're forming a learning community that's going to
21 support one another both to complete the program, but
22 then afterwards.

23 So, we would connect that veteran to another
24 fast-track growth venture cohort, and if they had
25 veteran specific needs, we would work individually to

1 meet those needs. So, we want to provide good
2 customer service, not keep them waiting for a full
3 veterans' cohort to form. Um, so they can express
4 their interest, but until we have enough interest to
5 form a veterans' only cohort, we will connect them to
6 those other fast track groups.
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Alright. That's, thank you.
9 But I, I just have one more question. Um, as a
10 requirement for the businesses to be located in New
11 York City, as we considering, well, are we
12 considering providing financial assistance similar to
13 the federal program SBA Veterans Advantage? Um, the
14 Small Business Administration, um, Veterans Advantage
15 Program which eliminates up front fees on loans up to
16 \$350,000 for veteran business owners. And, if you do,
17 uh, do the SBS, if their partner or their spouse,
18 would you train them just as well if a, a veteran
19 opened up a small business and they're in, in it
20 together, will you train the veteran and his wife?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll say a little bit then
22 pass over to Executive Deputy Commissioner Gross. Our
23 charter is to support veterans and their families.
24 And so, we, we going, we going to support everybody.
25 I'm sorry about, and I apologize, and this is on me,

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1 the testimony not being clear, the veterans and their
2 families. We will support. I just want to be clear
3 about that. I want to pass it on to Executive Deputy
4 Commissioner Gross as far as the SBA Veterans
5 Advantage, that question, that piece of it?
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Is it still in effect,
8 first?

9 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, I'd like
10 to look into and get back to you about that specific
11 program. Um, connecting businesses to financing
12 assistance is a huge part of our work. It's a major
13 priority for SBS. In FYI '22, I think, we connected
14 over 16,000 businesses to financing assistance with
15 major banks, with CDFIs and, you know, the federal
16 loan protection, the, the COVID relief programs,
17 state programs, and I'm happy to look into that
18 specific program.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Up front.

20 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: Absoltuey.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay.

22 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: Um, the
23 program that we have that lends up front capital is
24 for performance on, on City contracts. It's called
25 our contract financing and loan program. And through

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1 that program, businesses that are performing on City
2 contracts can borrow up to \$1 million, capped at 3%
3 interest from our CDFI partners to meet their
4 mobilization or, um, you know, up front staffing,
5 needs for materials to perform on City contracts. And
6 we can share more details about that as well.
7

8 And in addition, the work that we provide in our
9 workforce system is to veterans and their spouses.
10 And we placed, I believe, uh, about 530 veterans and
11 their spouses directly in, in, in jobs in FY '22.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: And thank you, Chairs, for
13 this very important hearing. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Great. Thank you so much. And
15 now we're going to call on Council Member Sandra Ung.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Hi, and thank you, um, for
17 all your testimonies today. I think I just have a
18 quick follow up question to, you know, all my
19 colleagues' questions. More through the lens of SBS,
20 I see that SBS do have a lot of programs for small
21 businesses which is great, but is there any programs
22 that are specific, directed, and resources directed
23 for veterans?

24 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, the, um,
25 program that I just mentioned in our workforce

1
2 centers, is specifically for veterans and we've run
3 it since 2012, I believe. So, I believe out of our
4 network of 19, uh, workforce one centers, seven
5 include veteran specialists. And, um, you know,
6 because we've providing a lot of those services
7 virtually, we really cover the system, uh, or cover
8 all of the veteran and their spouse needs. And so,
9 those, they really specialize in helping to address
10 training needs, placement needs of veterans and their
11 spouses.

12 And in addition, in our PTAC, uh, we are
13 providing technical assistance for all businesses
14 that want to grow through government contracting, but
15 that federal program does have a special focus on
16 veterans. So, in our PTAC, um, clientele, we track
17 specifically veteran state. And in FY '22, we
18 provided PTAC, I think, 20, 232 instances of services
19 to veteran owned businesses through our procurement
20 technical assistance center.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Um, great. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Great. Thank you. We're now
23 going to go to second round and we're going to begin
24 with Council Member Joann Ariola. Thank you.

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: I just have a, a question,
3 a couple of questions regarding the veteran owned
4 businesses. When they come to you and they would want
5 to apply, um, through your, your, uh, your Agency or
6 your department, through VetConnect, what kind of
7 services are available to that veteran to help them
8 with the application process, which we know sometimes
9 can be a bit arduous?

10 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I want to start, and then
11 I'll pass it one to Dynishal. And by the way, it's,
12 the other question, it's nyc.gov/vetresource. I'm so
13 sorry. It's nyc.gov/vetresource that has all that
14 information about our resource centers and that, the.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Thank you.

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: and then another on fast
17 track, too, real quick, we post it on
18 nyc.gov/vetbusiness, we have that fast track
19 curriculum for any of our veterans who want to take
20 themselves through what we have, a legacy curriculum
21 just wanted to say that, too.

22 Um, as far as the VBLA is that Swiss army knife
23 for us. And so, if someone comes to that Veteran
24 Business Leadership Association and they need help
25 doing this, that's where that help comes from. So, I

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1
2 just wanted to mention that as far as where we are in
3 this. When anyone, any, any application, City, state,
4 federal, or if you're looking at private, that's
5 where the VBLA is. I'll defer to my colleagues at
6 SBS.

7 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: Uh, Council
8 Member Ariola, in terms of the, the technical
9 assistance that our procurement Technical assistance
10 center provides, just we have seven staff people and
11 that are part of our PTAC and they are providing, um,
12 you know, webinars, group based services, you know,
13 meet the Agency events at various levels. But the
14 heart of their work is one on one technical
15 assistance with individual business owners.

16 And so, we, we run the MWBE recruitment and
17 certification program for the City. And the, the
18 whole team is expert in the registrations and
19 certifications that are important to businesses that
20 want to grow through contracting with government. So
21 it is, it is intensive, line my line, you know,
22 within an application, assistance, making sure it's
23 completed correctly, that the supporting
24 documentation are correctly, you know, labeled and
25 uploaded correctly, and all the way through to the

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1 completion of that process and outcome, um, from the
2 Agency that's reviewing that.
3

4 And, uh, we track that work down to the minute.
5 We have to report to our federal funders, you know,
6 time of, uh, in service for each of those clients.
7 So, it's tracked in detail in our CRM, and we report
8 out, um, both as part of our MMR goals and to our
9 federal partners who fund that program on an annual
10 basis.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: And so, thank you. And
12 that is so important because the applications can be
13 elaborate and for, for anyone, so I appreciate that.
14 Um, so, so for the amount of people who apply, I
15 would imagine a number get denied. Right, if they
16 apply for a street permit license, right, and so, or
17 they're a business, or an MWBE, so, not everyone who
18 applies is granted that licensing, right. So, what
19 would be two or three reasons why one of the, a
20 veteran coming in would be denied, an MWBE or any
21 type of licensing under, uh, a veterans' program?

22 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yeah, so,
23 these are programs that are not limited in terms of
24 the capacity of the resource. It's not like, you
25 know, licensing where there is a limited supply of

1 licenses for the City, and that limitation can be a
2 reason for rejection.
3

4 These programs want to welcome every eligible
5 business and they, you know, they're only goal is to
6 exclude businesses that aren't eligible. And because
7 we're really focused on providing excellent customer
8 service, we do our best to screen the applicants for
9 eligibility at the beginning of the process. We don't
10 want a business owner putting time into pulling
11 together a complicated application and supporting
12 documentation and then hitting failure. That, that is
13 not our practice.

14 So, I would say the reason, um, you know, many
15 applicants may begin the process and not complete the
16 application, um, and usually the reason for that has
17 to do with their own record-keeping, you know,
18 deficits in their record keeping and needing time to
19 supplement that or current that. So, if you're in tax
20 arrears, um, then you can't complete that application
21 because we want to see, and we want to know that
22 we're presenting a pool of vendors to our City
23 Agencies and other partners that are financially
24 responsible and can pass a responsibility
25 determination. So, often it's just their record

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1 keeping, their business record keeping, the financial
2 record keeping that they need support in shoring up
3 better, organizing in order to complete that
4 application process. But we do not have a high, um,
5 rejection rate, a high denial rate.
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Okay. Thank you. Thank you
8 for your answers.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Uh, thank you, Council Member
10 Ariola. And I just, uh, before we, um, excuse this
11 panel, I just want to bring up, because, uh, Council
12 Member Mealy mentioned it, about mental health, uh,
13 services and referrals.

14 Um, when we visited the Borden Avenue Veterans
15 Shelter, um, the number one complaint was food, um,
16 which we're trying to remedy. Um, the other
17 complaint, um, was also the lack of privacy in the
18 congregate part of it, and I've been working with
19 Commissioner, uh, Jenkins from DHS to try to solve
20 that.

21 But a big complaint was just many were not
22 referred to the proper Agency or doctor or hospital
23 on mental health. That was the big complaint, that
24 many of the residents said mental health's in a big
25 problem in, in the Borden Shelter. I, I want to know

1 what, what's the referral like and where does, um,
2 your Agency, Commissioner, come in? um, do you visit
3 the Borden Shelter, you know, regularly to, to sit
4 down with the men? Do you, um, listen to their needs,
5 um, if they're not being served properly or they're
6 not being referred to the proper Agency or they're
7 not getting the health treatment they, um, require,
8 do you step in? Uh, because that's a big complaint,
9 uh, the mental health. You could sometimes see it
10 when you're talking to the men that there is a big
11 issue there.
12

13 So, do we just rely on the not for profit that's
14 running it, or do, do you step in?

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, we do have staff that,
16 that is, that works at, at Borden and has their own
17 office space there. And so, we have a presence there
18 regularly. I personally make it a point to frequent
19 to visit, uh. My last visit was like two, three weeks
20 ago, Mr. Chair. So, you know, we try to check in with
21 folks on things and ways that we can be able to help.
22 And it's an all-hands-on deck approach between
23 having, um, City and federal officials there and
24 nonprofit reps there as well, to work with the men
25 who are at Borden, um.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, what, what improvements
3 have you seen there since we visited last?

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: To me, and it's not
5 improvements I have seen it's knowing that, uh,
6 knowing that DSS is moving forward with bidding on t
7 eh pods as far as having the contained areas. I know
8 that's something that we have seen as far as
9 progress. Um, and I, I'm, sorry for not being able to
10 speak off hand about other like, big bullets. I
11 understand that food is moving forward as well but
12 forgive me for not being briefed on it fully, but,
13 you know, I, I know that things are moving there.

14 Whenever I think about, about not just Borden but
15 all of our folks who are in the system, it's really
16 about, for those who have mental health issues and
17 need supportive housing, making sure that we are
18 working hard with other supportive housing developers
19 on the rent up, on, on being able to get that
20 supportive housing unit for that veteran who has a
21 need. That's, that's where I'm focused as far as a
22 lot.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, and that was a big
24 complaint that they weren't getting that service. So,
25 uh, you know, and I know that's difficult especially

1 in this, these times, but, um, what I want to see is,
2 uh, you know, a, a report that we're improving the
3 situation, and I, and I keep, you know, Commissioner
4 Jenkins is doing what he can.
5

6 But he said it's a, a budgetary problem with
7 upgrading the food, which they were getting those
8 little microwave plastic horrendous dinners. They're
9 this size. And you saw that. And they have a big
10 kitchen. So, I, I really want to, you know, it's been
11 a while, and, you know, I do check in with, uh, the
12 Commissioner, uh, from time to time to see what's
13 going on with the modules. We're trying to give the
14 men there, what they used to have was privacy. They,
15 and the VA does set that, in that part of it, as you
16 know, the City doesn't. The City has a congregate
17 model which is, and I know I'm, I'm going off track a
18 little bit but I, I am going to visit the location
19 again, and I, I think we should get, get some
20 progress on the food that we can, we can utilize
21 their, their good kitchen and start making decent
22 meals for the men. They deserve it. Our veterans
23 deserve it. And when we were there, the air
24 conditioner wasn't working. Was that fixed?

1
2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That has been fixed, Mr.
3 Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HENDON: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's good, that's a, that's
7 a. So, that's an improvement. But in the heat wave,
8 they were suffering in there and our veterans should
9 not do that. That should not, that should be priority
10 for this administration. Um, that our homeless
11 veterans are at least treated, um, with respect and
12 given decent conditions.

13 And the City should, and I did speak to the Mayor
14 about it and I did speak to, uh, Commissioner
15 Jenkins, but it took a long time to fix it. It was,
16 it was like, I think, a month, and, and august was,
17 was brutal. And that place cooks. I mean, if you go
18 in there, it's very, very hot and they have big fans
19 that are noisy and poor lighting. The lighting is
20 commercial. It's fluorescent. That's no place. You
21 know, you can't live like that. So, I, I would love
22 that if we can set some goals and work with, uh,
23 Commissioner Jenkins and the Mayor's Office, if you
24 could help, you know, facilitate that. So, thank you
25 panel. Thank you so much.

1 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Um.

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Oh, sorry.

3 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Council Member Vickie Paladino
4 said she has one question.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. I'm sorry.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Not so much a question
7 as it is a statement. \$6 million is your budget,
8 overall? That's pathetic, absolutely pathetic. This
9 City funds everything, everything. I'm an old movie
10 buff. Something called the forgotten man, well, in
11 this case it's a forgotten generation, and
12 generation, and generation. And this hearing is
13 really making me very sad because there are so many
14 people who put their lives on the line for this
15 country each and every day and continue to do so
16 under the worst circumstances in this present
17 administration, and I have to say, that \$6 million
18 for the VA is absolutely ridiculous. It's not your
19 fault.

20 We got to examine and reexamine and go back to
21 the table. We want more money for our veterans. They
22 deserve it. These are, this is the most diversified
23 group of people. These are people who got started at
24 17 years of age and enlisted to serve this country.
25

1
2 And the very fact that we cannot treat them with any
3 priorities whatsoever, they are literally, literally
4 at the bottom of the bucket. It's enough.

5 It's not your fault. It's \$6 million out of
6 \$101.1 billion New York City budget. We are funding
7 everything, and yet we are forgetting those who serve
8 this country. Enough is enough. I think as a City
9 Council we need to pull together and we need to go to
10 that table, and we need to ask for what these
11 citizens of the United States of America deserve.
12 Because we're giving it out all for free, and yet
13 these guys and women, they cannot get what they
14 deserve. They can't even get a good meal.

15 Bob, you mentioned about the air conditioning.
16 Are they going to have heat this winter? I mean,
17 that's how ridiculous this is. So, nothing against
18 you guys at all, but we got to go to the table, and
19 we got to beg and we got to do what we need to do as
20 51 members of this City Council needs to do, to
21 support our vets. Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Council Member.

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: May I, may I say something?

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, go ahead.
25

1
2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: On, just on that, just, uh.
3 Please don't forget our VSOs also, our Veteran
4 Service Organizations also. In other words, we've got
5 folks who also apply for City Council funding and,
6 you know, anything, just to, to remember, my first
7 time testifying when, at a hearing, I was somebody
8 who led a VSO, led the Veteran Future Lab. I see my
9 successor here right now. So, just, you know, just
10 thinking about that group too when we're thinking
11 about resources.

12 To us, accomplishing the mission is resources,
13 but that doesn't all have to be DVS. I, I in other
14 words, if the dollar is in front of you and it's
15 between helping one of our brother or sister vet
16 organizations or us, give it to one of our
17 organizations. That's all I'm saying.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: That's correct.

19 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Just to make sure that we
20 (CROSSTALK).

21 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: I think most vet, uh,
22 most of us, City Council, I think we do, I know I do,
23 we give our funding to the vets a lot. But the point
24 is, we really need to see your budget go from \$6
25 million up a bit. Don't you think? How do you exist

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1 on \$6 million. You know, well, if this was 30 years
2 ago, I'd say, well, maybe, yeah, \$6 million is a fair
3 share there. \$6 million today is a drop in the bucket
4 when we're giving away what we're giving away for
5 free. And our, our men and women are suffering
6 terribly. This, this cannot be. It should not be.
7 Thank you.

8
9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. Thank you, Council
10 Member. Thank you, Panel. Thank you, Commissioners.
11 Thanks, thanks so much.

12 PANELIST: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much to this
14 panel. We'll now be turning to public testimony. Our
15 first panel for public testimony will be. Our first
16 panel for public testimony will be Alexa Madero and
17 Andrea Tan.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin when the
20 Sergeant starts your clock.

21 DIRECTOR MODERO: Good to go? Uh, good afternoon.
22 Uh, my name is Alexa Modero. I am the, uh, Director
23 of Veteran Entrepreneurship Initiatives at NYU Tandon
24 School of Engineering's Veterans Future Lab. I am
25 also an entrepreneur and military spouse. I want to

1
2 thank Chairperson Holden, Chairperson Menin, and
3 fellow Council Members for taking the opportunity to
4 hear from us today on a very important subject.

5 Uh, the Veterans Future lab, also known as the
6 VFL, uh, is here to share who we're empowering New
7 York City veterans and helping them thrive in their
8 post-military service careers. NYU recognizes the
9 challenges that veterans face when reintegrating post
10 service and we are committed to providing effective,
11 tangible solutions. Operated by NYU Tandon, and
12 launched in 2017, the VFL helps early-stage companies
13 created by veterans or their spouses transform into
14 successful businesses by providing the guidance,
15 expertise and resources that startups need to
16 succeed.

17 The incubator is a public-private academic
18 partnership where entrepreneurs are nurtured by
19 university partners with support from government and
20 the private sector. By leveraging the wealth of
21 talent and diverse skill sets found in the New York
22 City veterans' community, we are able to accelerate
23 the growth of new venture and bring economic activity
24 to the area.

1 The VFL is home to two premier entrepreneurship
2 programs, APEX, and Veteran Entrepreneurship Training
3 I and II, also know at VET. APEX is a nine month, no
4 cost, startup business incubation program that
5 provides mentorship, support, and resources needed to
6 start and grow high impact companies. Veteran
7 Entrepreneurship Training I and II is a free
8 multiweek skills focused program for early stage and
9 aspiring entrepreneurs that one, is an introductory,
10 educational program for active-duty service members,
11 US military veterans, and their spouses new to the
12 entrepreneurship space, while VET II reinforces
13 business fundamental and introduces intermediate
14 frameworks essential to the launch adventures by US
15 service members, veterans, and military spouses.
16

17 Since 2015, the VFL has graduated 285 students
18 and supported over 70 venturers. Currently, VFL is
19 home to 10 incubator companies through the APEX
20 program after graduating a cohort of 11 companies in
21 May and 30 VET I participants, which is the third
22 cohort of VET for this year. We continue to work with
23 our partners including Barclays, ESDC, New York State
24 Assembly, and Goodwin, to ensure the continued
25 growths and success of our work.

1 In 2021, as mentioned earlier, the Veterans
2
3 Future Lab released a study, the Veteran Journey to
4 Entrepreneurship which aimed to capture veterans'
5 experiences alongside their entrepreneurship journey,
6 including challenges, successes, resources used, and
7 lessons learned. The study also gathered perspectives
8 from active-duty service members and reservists who
9 might embark on the entrepreneurship journey in the
10 future. These perspectives can help program
11 implementors and policy makers understand the
12 characteristics and motivations of future
13 entrepreneurs to better tailor support for this
14 group.

15 Key findings as mentioned earlier, uh, include
16 that veteran entrepreneurship correlates with socio-
17 emotional wellbeing. The top challenges faced by
18 veteran entrepreneur respondents includes marketing,
19 personal finances, and lack of initial capital,
20 professional networks, informal relationships, and
21 professional development programs ranked among the
22 most useful resources for veteran entrepreneurs. And
23 the experience in the military and transition to
24 civilian life plays a key role in future
25 entrepreneurship.

1
2 The veteran journey to entrepreneurship can be
3 longer than that of its civilian counterpart. Though
4 the cost of service, can come with the advantages of
5 military training and experience. The VFL is greatly
6 optimistic about the future of veteran
7 entrepreneurship in New York City and across the
8 country. And with our private and public partners, we
9 look forward to improving the lives of veterans and
10 their families and as we, uh, come to a close, just
11 want to share our support of Intro 476. Happy to
12 answer any questions that the Committee might have.
13 Thank you.

14 DIRECTOR TAN: Good afternoon. My name is Andrea
15 Tan. I'm, uh, the Microenterprise budget director at
16 Volunteers of Legal Service, VOLS. VOLS was
17 established in 1984 and our purpose is to leverage
18 private attorneys to provide free legal services to
19 low income New Yorkers to help fill the justice gap.
20 For over 20 years, the VOLS Microenterprise Project
21 has helped existing and aspiring small business
22 owners access high quality, free legal services from
23 our dedicated staff and our network of pro bono
24 attorneys.

1
2 For many New Yorkers, owning a small business is
3 an effective path out of poverty and into financial
4 stability and independence. VOLS helps with entity
5 formation, drafting and reviewing contracts,
6 protecting intellectual property, among other
7 transactional small business needs. Uh, we partner
8 with community and economic development organizations
9 to connect with clients who would benefit from our
10 legal assistance, focusing on minority, women,
11 immigrant, and veteran owned businesses.

12 Our Microenterprise Project works together with
13 our veterans' initiative to connect with veteran-
14 service organizations to help identify and serve
15 veteran entrepreneurs and small business owners. We
16 then help veteran entrepreneurs identify their legal
17 needs and create an action plan to address them. By
18 providing our clients access to high caliber pro bono
19 attorneys in our partner law firms, we strive to
20 level the playing field for veteran small business
21 owners who are otherwise unable to pay the
22 prohibitive cost of a lawyer.

23 VOLS recognizes New York City's efforts to better
24 identify veteran businesses, support their growth,
25 and prepare, uh, those businesses for City

1 procurement opportunities. The present proposed bill
2 is an example of these efforts. The Department of
3 Small Business Services with the City's Chief
4 Procurement Officer would enable veteran owned
5 businesses to identify as such when registering to do
6 business with the City. And the City would create a
7 veteran leadership advisory program to educate
8 veteran owned businesses about City procurement
9 opportunities.
10

11 While these commitments to support veteran
12 entrepreneurs is significant, it is also crucial that
13 we focus on the implementation of this proposal,
14 specifically on how the city would provide small
15 businesses an opportunity to self-identify as
16 veteran-owned on the City website or in any other
17 means of registration.

18 In working with individuals who have prior
19 military experience, we have observed that there are
20 many variations in veteran identity that result from
21 such factors as discharge status, serving in a
22 politically controversial war like Vietnam, Iraq, or
23 Afghanistan, serving during peace time, participating
24 in combat, or having had an at least partly negative
25 military experience associated with trauma or

1 discrimination, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual
2 orientation, being born outside of the United States,
3 and other personal level characteristics may also
4 affect veteran identity.
5

6 Therefore, the City should consider how
7 variations in veteran identity may affect
8 participation in the proposed programs, and how to
9 carefully assess veteran identity so the visible,
10 normal population does not get lost in the process.

11 The key is, the key to effectively screen for
12 military service is to properly ask the question.
13 Given the many variations in veteran identity, shaped
14 by an individual's unique military experience, it is
15 not as simple as asking are you a veteran? Many
16 individuals may not consider themselves veterans or
17 may believe that their military experiences don't
18 even count. For these reasons, it's important to
19 screen in a manner that captures as many individuals
20 as possible who served our country and are now
21 business owners.

22 Uh, our City veterans represent the best of what
23 we have to offer. And we should continue to strive to
24 provide them with all the support they need, uh, upon
25 their return home and as they build their economic

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1 futures. Thank you for allowing us to submit this
2 testimony and for supporting the needs of New York
3 City veteran entrepreneurs.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you both for your, um,
6 testimony., and, um, and the service to our veterans.
7 Uh, what would you, what Agency, I mean, is it Small
8 Business Services, what's your number one referral to
9 your programs, where veterans that are coming in. Is,
10 is SBS doing the job, uh, or is, um, you know what,
11 what Agency is getting you, um, the referrals?

12 DIRECTOR TAN: For VOLS, currently?

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, yeah. Right.

14 DIRECTOR TAN: So, um, we currently are working
15 with, uh, organization that serve seniors, so seniors
16 and veterans, so we have a program there, but we're
17 definitely looking into connecting with other
18 community organizations so that we can reach out to
19 more veterans with business needs.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And what about NYU?

21 DIRECTOR MODERO: So, it's a combination of a few
22 things, but primarily veteran services organizations
23 that operate within the veteran entrepreneurship
24 space. DVS has been an immense partner for us as well
25 as the SBA.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay, great. Thank you so
4 much. Any, any other question?

5 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yes, I had one question, uh,
6 for NYU. So, you mentioned that the top challenges
7 faced by veteran entrepreneurs were marketing,
8 personal finance and access to capital, which I had
9 asked the administration. Do you also have specific
10 recommendations for the City?

11 DIRECTOR MODERO: So, there are certainly
12 recommendations that we've acted on as the Veterans
13 Future Lab as far as visiting workshops and such. I
14 think it's something we can certainly collaborate
15 with DVS on implementing further.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. That would be great.
17 Thank you. Thank you so much, both of you.

18 DIRECTOR TAN: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Council Member Mealy?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes, I just saw that you
21 said you, um, partners including Barclay, the EDC,
22 and New York's State Assembly. Are you don't partner
23 well with the New York City Council?

24 DIRECTOR MODERO: Um.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you explain that?

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1
2 DIRECTOR MODERO: Um, to my knowledge, New York
3 State Assembly has been a sponsor of our program
4 since it began in 2015. I'm not sure of any
5 historical relations with City Council, um, but of
6 course, very open to that conversation and the
7 support.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. I'm looking
9 forward.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you very much.

11 DIRECTOR MODERO: Thank you.

12 DIRECTOR TAN: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much to this
14 panel. Our next panel is going to be, um, our final
15 panel. It's going to be, um, Frank Vissage (SP?),
16 Rabba Belkovtiz (SP?), and Telhutti (SP?) Elbay
17 (SP?). Apologies for any pronunciation, uh,
18 mispronunciations. Mr. Vissage, you may start when
19 the Sergeant starts your clock.

20 MR. VISSAGE: Uh, I'm a disabled veteran. I work
21 in Times Square, and I'm having a lot of difficulty
22 with the Police Department not enforcing, with the
23 Police Department not reinforcing the restricted area
24 rules on 44th Street, 45th Street, and 43rd Street. And
25 also, the blue license is supposed to go on the front

1 on the corner and the Police Department is not
2 enforcing that also.
3

4 And I don't know why. It's a written law in New
5 York City and this was clearly the recommendations by
6 code for New York City and it's in black and white
7 and just nothing is being done about it. So, I'm here
8 to share to see if we can get something done, or
9 something, I don't know. But I'm working on this for
10 four, five months.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Rabba?

12 MR. BELKOVITZ: Yeah. Hello there. How are you? MY
13 name is Rabba Belkovitz. I'm a service-connected
14 disabled veteran myself and I'm a street vendor like
15 Frank. And first, we want to thank you for, uh, for
16 this hearing or whatever, and, uh, like I said, uh,
17 uh, since 1894, 1894, I mean, we never had a chance
18 to speak. But today, thank you for this. And I want
19 to thank in the beginning, the, the Mr. Chairman and
20 you guys and Greg, who's the Director of Legislator
21 at the Chairman's Office. And the Commissioner in the
22 DVS cause they are the only one who are listening to
23 us.

24 I just want to let you know that 1/3 of the
25 homeless population in New York are disabled, I mean,

1 veterans, the people who served our country. And you
2 were mentioning, uh, about getting the job with the
3 city. As disabled veterans, we cannot get a job
4 because I have a pharmacy here, so nobody's going to
5 give us a job with, you know, and we have our
6 disability that occurred during war serving our
7 county.

9 The big problem that we have street vending, it's
10 the only job as disabled veterans, we can do. Because
11 we go into the hospital, just today we supposed to
12 have six people coming, three they already at the
13 hospital. He's 82 years old man, with all due respect
14 to you, Frank, but who's going to give him a job?
15 Like I says, I have a pharmacy here. Thank you both
16 mentioning this, but I'm going to tell you one thing.
17 It's the only job that our disabled veterans can do
18 to provide for his family because with this job, we
19 can close the table and go see the doctors.

20 But the problem, what we're facing today, I'm
21 going to answer the question, yes, as a veteran, it's
22 easy to get a license. It's easy to get one. But it's
23 not easy to find a spot because, the regular spot,
24 the legal, legal spot that we have, the non-veterans
25 are taking our spot. We keep talking to NYPD every

1 single day. Thanks to Greg, we called and the
2 Commissioner, he called the DCWP, but DCWP has no
3 power. It's NYPD.
4

5 Just this morning, we had a meeting with the
6 Sergeant at Midtown South because just, I'm going to
7 tell you now. Last week, I was going because I'm
8 helping. That's what I, I volunteer for this. I was
9 helping a veteran to set up a table. You know what
10 the guy, the non-veteran there, what he told me? He
11 told me if you put a table here, I'm going to smash
12 that table over your head.

13 We are disabled. We can't fight. We did our
14 fight. That's it. We're done. But man, we can't do
15 that. If you go, I mean, you know what, by the way,
16 you wouldn't believe how many, how I'm sorry, you
17 know, I'm getting, how many homeless we have. The
18 (INAUDIBLE), she killed herself a week before I was
19 with her because of this illegal. You know, she was
20 working and everything. One day she couldn't work and
21 then, you know, I'm going, I can't take you every
22 corner where we have disabled veterans begging.

23 That's no good for us. So, this is what's going,
24 we need help. And believe it or not, the City are
25 going against us. They're giving tickets. How you

1 give a 1,000, I mean, by the way, how can you let
2 someone who's not even served this country get away
3 and you go to an 80 years old man and tell him no,
4 you cannot work here.
5

6 This is what's going on. You know, we try to get
7 help. We talk with the NYPD. They always say okay. I
8 did talk to the commissioner. Oh, our hands are tied.
9 Disabled veterans need help today. We served. We
10 defended our country. We are not asking for anything,
11 just for the, the law to be enforced. Then we can go,
12 you know, these guys can go back. I'm here. I will
13 help any disabled veterans to get the license. I
14 would have to be on. Dan Rossi, he's there. Dan
15 Rossi, he's giving jobs only to, to veterans and
16 disabled veterans.

17 You know something, he's sleeping in his spot,
18 sleeping in his spot for many years to protect his
19 spot. He's twice in Vietnam. Ask him. Mr. Rossi,
20 stand up. Nine years, he's sleeping in streets, 82
21 2nd Street and 5th Avenue. We used to work together.
22 You know why? Because he go, because if he doesn't
23 sleep here, they go and take his spot. A guy who
24 served twice in Vietnam. So, the City should give us
25

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1 some consideration. And I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman.
2 Thank you, by the way.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: We'll, uh, we'll meet. You
5 know, let's schedule a meeting.

6 MR. BELKOVITZ: Thank you for everything, yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And then, um, we'll sit down
8 and we'll, we'll have somebody, a representative of
9 the NYPD and all the other Agencies, Consumer
10 Affairs.

11 MR. BELKOVITZ: Thank you. Greg always helping us.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: We'll, we'll do, we'll try it
13 again. It's a difficult process, but.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Please include me.

15 MR. BELKOVITZ: NYPD.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yes. We'll sit, we'll, we'll
18 schedule a meeting, I promise.

19 MR. BELKOVITZ: Thank you very much. Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Chair Holden.

21 MR. BELKOVITZ: God bless you. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now, we'll turn to our last
24 panelist, Telhutti Elbay. You may begin your
25 testimony when the Sergeant starts your clock.

1
2 MR. ELBAY: Hi, um, I hope that you all are doing,
3 uh, well this afternoon. Uh, I wrote this out by the
4 way, but, um, I'm Telhutti Elbay (INAUDIBLE). My
5 grandfather on my father's side of my family was a
6 marine veteran, now deceased who unfortunately passed
7 in not the best living conditions. Um, I think that
8 he served in Vietnam, um. By the way, uh, I found out
9 about this, this Committee between yesterday and
10 today so I'm not as prepared as I should, right. Um,
11 but anyway, I'm getting into it.

12 More than 2.4 million US businesses are owned by
13 veterans, um. This is more likely outdated but, uh,
14 about 9% of all American firms, right, they employ
15 5.8 million employees and dole out \$210 billion in
16 annual pay. Well, I just heard someone earlier say \$6
17 billion, so it's even more now. But, um, in 2019,
18 there were around 2.15 million black or African
19 American veterans in the United States about, around
20 12% of the total veteran population. Just 2.4% of US
21 businesses are black owners, even though black people
22 represent 12.8% of the US population. Meanwhile,
23 86.5% of US businesses have white owners despite
24 white people accounting for a lower percentage, 72%
25 of the US population.

1
2 Like I said, I'm not prepared. That part doesn't
3 add up. The numbers are off. Um, that's 84, this,
4 this, I will, that's 84.1% gap in equality when
5 comparing and contrasting blacks and Caucasians and a
6 6.6 gap in equality when comparing and contrasting
7 blacks and veterans. And yes, I'm well aware that
8 there are black veterans. That's all.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Members, are there any
10 questions for this panel? Okay. I'd like to,
11 apologies, this slip was just passed up to me. I'd
12 like to Dan Rossi up to the panel to testify.

13 MR. ROSSI: Uh, good afternoon.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Mr. Rossi, you may begin when
15 the Sergeant starts your clock.

16 MR. ROSSI: I couldn't hear what she said. Um, uh,
17 where do I start here? I've been coming to these
18 hearings since 1982. Uh, and I'm just trying to pick
19 up on a few things. Councilman Holden hit on the
20 Borden Shelter. What you said today, I heard that 20
21 years ago. Nothing's changed and nothing's going to
22 change. It's nice, there's a lot of compassion here
23 and I know your hearts are in the right place, but
24 once you leave this room, that's about pretty much as
25

1 far as anything's going to go. And you got to be
2 honest with that.
3

4 Um, I didn't catch a lot of the things about, um,
5 financing things for disabled owned businesses. I've
6 been in business over 40 years. As a disabled
7 veteran, I employ disabled veterans. I'm a Vietnam
8 vet, so we had it a lot worse than any other vets
9 that, in this country ever had it. And without any
10 help from anyone, I built the largest vending company
11 in the history of the City. It was so successful,
12 that the City Council, the people sitting in your
13 chairs, put me out of business at the behest of
14 Donald Trump cause he didn't want to see any cripples
15 in front of his building. And I fought him, and I got
16 veterans the right to work back in midtown Manhattan.
17 The cost of that was my business. And that's okay.
18 That's yesterday.

19 What's happening now, and I know Council Member
20 Mealy, and Council Member Paladino, you hit on
21 vending a little bit, well, the City right now, the
22 City, the Mayor right now is denying veterans the
23 right to vend. As long as a veteran has a state
24 license, it supersedes any local law and veterans
25

1 cannot be denied a permit or a license to vend. They
2 cannot do it, but the veterans can't fight this.

3
4 Right now, we're in, um, we're back in the
5 appellate court because the City's trying to take
6 away our rights to vend around the parks. The third
7 time I'm in the, we're back in appellate court. So,
8 all this great stuff about helping veterans is
9 beautiful, except when I walk out that door, and the
10 other side of it, they don't care what you say. The
11 Mayor don't care what you say. He's listening to the
12 people who put him in that seat and that's the way
13 it's going to be.

14 I've been sleeping in the street for 11 years to
15 protect my family. And I'm going to keep doing it
16 because I know nobody in this room and nobody on the
17 other side is going to do it. I do it because I'm
18 going to do it. So, you know, I, I gave you a great
19 example on enforcement when he was talking about
20 enforcement. My daughter who is also a disabled vet,
21 she got a ticket yesterday. She got the ticket
22 because I wrote a book, and we were advertising the
23 book at the cart. Three cops, three enforcement from
24 the parks, came to my daughter to take that sign down
25 so she, for the book. I mean, it's, it's, but six of

1 them, these guys are in Times Square. You couldn't
2 get a cop to help them in a million years. But six
3 people came yesterday to try and stop me. And this is
4 a must read for everybody here. It's going to tell
5 you exactly what happens to a vet when he comes back.
6 It's going to tell you exactly when he's successful
7 and he steps on the wrong toes and how people like
8 you destroy the veterans. When they put me out of
9 business, they destroyed all hopes of veterans being
10 vendors, and they knew, the people in your chairs
11 knew exactly what they were doing.

12
13 So, you buy the book. You want to learn what you
14 did, you want to learn the, the, the hatred that you
15 had for us 25 years ago, you buy the book. Amazon,
16 the Hot Dog King of New York, the New York Hot Dog
17 King. Buy it, read it, learn what you people did to
18 us, what you're doing to us right now. Right now,
19 you're trying to tell me I can't vend in, on, from
20 where I am. Right now, I'm in the appellate court the
21 third time, and they're going to drag this out for
22 two years because we've already won twice. How many
23 times can you win and have to go and do it again? It
24 takes money and it takes time. And I'm getting older.
25 Do you understand?

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3 And I, I saw a lot of compassion and honesty
4 here, I really did. I really did. I said, "You know,
5 they really have their heart in the right place." But
6 that's it. That's as far as it goes. We're on our
7 own.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Dan, um, this is a new
9 administration, so, let's.

10 MR. ROSSI: The, well the new administration.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: No, no, no. Wait, wait.

12 MR. ROSSI: Hold on a second. The new
13 administration, I don't see anything happening.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: No, but here's, here's,
15 here's what I want.

16 MR. ROSSI: I sat down with the new
17 administration, they said, "Well try and do something
18 for you."

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I want to sit down with you
20 guys. I want to sit down.

21 MR. ROSSI: Wait a second.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: We tried before.

23 MR. ROSSI: Hold on a second. Can I say something?
24 I met with you already. We spoke.

25 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I know.

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1
2 MR. ROSSI: You talked to me face to face and
3 said, "Dan, I'm going to help the vets." And when I
4 tried to meet with you, I wasn't allowed to meet with
5 you. So, I stopped calling. I don't talk, I only talk
6 to Council Members. I don't talk to middle people.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Again, I don't, I don't, I
8 don't know the circumstances of that.

9 MR. ROSSI: I'm telling you. Um, look, I'm, I'm,
10 this is heated.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I'm telling you.

12 MR. ROSSI: This is heated.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Let's meet.

14 MR. ROSSI: But only, only for one reason. I, I'm,
15 that's as loud as it's going to get. Only for one
16 reason, I know what you want to do. I've seen it.
17 I've heard it so many, many times.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I get it, but.

19 MR. ROSSI: And I'm an optimist. I want to believe
20 that you're going to help.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. But let's try one
22 more time, alright?

23 MR. ROSSI: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Cause it's complicated. It
25 is, it's not as simple. It's complicated because

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1
2 there's different Agencies involved, Consumer Affairs
3 comes in, uh, the NYPD, we have to educate and that's
4 the problem. I have, listen, I have the same problem
5 with commercial vehicles, where that one officer
6 doesn't give them a ticket. They, they interpret it
7 differently. It's not as simple many times. But we
8 have to, with a new administration, maybe this Mayor
9 will listen. I think he will. Let's try to sit down
10 with representatives from the Mayor's Office, you
11 guys, my office, and maybe we could try to accomplish
12 something to help you guys out. Don't give up, Dan.
13 Just.

14 MR. ROSSI: I'm not asking for your help. I'm on
15 my own.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright.

17 MR. ROSSI: I don't need anyone's help.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. But I'll.

19 MR. ROSSI: I can sit down with you 20 times, and
20 at the last time, you'll say, "You know, we're not
21 going to do it."

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: If the NYPD.

23 MR. ROSSI: I'm just saying it. I've been through
24 it. I've counted on the City Council. I was betrayed

25

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3 by the City Council over and over. You have no idea
4 what you people did to me.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Hello? I know exactly what
6 you're talking about.

7 MR. ROSSI: Good.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm just asking that when
9 you all do meet, could I be there? I think my
10 (CROSSTALK).

11 MR. ROSSI: Yes, yes. I'll meet.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I have veterans that come
13 to me and the only way I found out about the vendors,
14 where I kept poking and poking and poking to find out
15 what's going on. They are circumventing the vendors.
16 They trying to give somebody new the permits. So, I'm
17 willing to sit down.

18 MR. ROSSI: The veterans.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: And remember, the only way
20 I got here, I kept fighting. And one thing I want to
21 talk to you about, and we could finish, how do you
22 eat a whale?

23 MR. ROSSI: Say that again?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How do you eat a whale?

25 MR. ROSSI: Keep away? I don't know.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How do you eat a white
3 whale, a big whale? One bite at a time. So, let's
4 just keep going at it. Sooner or later, someone's
5 going to break. And I feel you got to do letter
6 campaigns. You do have to put some skin in the game.
7 You done tried everybody else. Now, try the best.
8 Let's try us now. That's all we can go.

9 MR. ROSSI: I'll give it a try.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Please.

11 MR. ROSSI: I, I'm, I'm, I'm always optimistic
12 that something good's going to happen.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Cause if, if you stop, if
14 you stop, then the next generation will have to start
15 all the way over. So, please just give us a, we don't
16 need to talk no more. Let's just start over from
17 here. Give us a little time.

18 MR. ROSSI: Just to show you that I don't quit,
19 they took everything I had.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I can imagine.

21 MR. ROSSI: I stayed, I stayed, and the veterans
22 got permits only because I took the City to Court.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Wait. The late, you think.
24
25

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3 MR. ROSSI: I took them (CROSSTALK) he could get a
4 permit. I had to take the City to court. I did it. I
5 had nothing to gain by doing it.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I understand. Let us go
7 from here.

8 MR. ROSSI: So, the veterans are always going to
9 have me till I can't do it anymore.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Got you. Thank you, Chair
11 Holden.

12 MR. ROSSI: Thank you.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm looking forward to this
14 meeting. And please.

15 MR. ROSSI: Any time you're ready, I'll be there.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: No, whenever you're ready.
17 You sure you're ready for me?

18 MR. ROSSI: I'll be there, don't worry.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Alright. Alrighty. Thank
20 you.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you, Chair Menin.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you and we, by the way,
24 we did meet several times, so, uh, you know, again, I
25 don't want to look to the past, but let's try. We

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3 have a new administration. Alright? That's all I have
4 to say. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

6 PANELISTS: Thank you. Thank you, guys. Thank you.
7 Thank you. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. I'd
9 like to just do a last call, um, to see if we've
10 missed anybody, to see if anybody would like to
11 testify who has registered to do so. Seeing none, I'm
12 now going to turn it over to the Chairs for closing
13 remarks.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Um, any, any other, any other
15 comments or we're going to close. Thank you so much,
16 everyone, and, um, I'm going to officially close this
17 hearing.

18 [GAVEL]
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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 7, 2022