



**Testimony of Adam Connolly
Assistant Commissioner of Engagement & Community Services for New York City
Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)**

**New York City Council Committee on Veterans
November 19, 2019, 10:00am**

Introduction

Good morning Chairman Deutsch, members of the committees, and advocates. My name is Adam Connolly and I am proud to serve as the Assistant Commissioner of Engagement & Community Services for the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). I am joined today by Cassandra Alvarez, Associate Commissioner of Private-Public Partnerships at DVS.

Commissioner Hendon who is unable to attend this hearing sends his regards. On behalf of the Commissioner and New York City veterans, we would like to extend our appreciation to the committees for their continued advocacy and support. As always, DVS staff members are proud to meet councilmembers at our Veteran Resource Centers to maintain our ongoing collaborations to better the New York City (NYC) veteran community.

Organizational Development

Like those we serve, DVS adheres to a military training framework. We must first begin by crawling, before we can walk or run. Under the guidance and expertise of Commissioner Sutton we executed that crawl framework. In three short years, an agency that once operated in the Mayor's office, evolved into a standalone agency with approximately forty-four employees. These employees, motivated by the mission to serve veterans, worked tirelessly to get DVS to the level and capacity that it is today. In this time, through the help of our sister agencies and staff members banding together, DVS was able to successfully procure both VetConnectNYC and Pay for Success, each leading to notable progress in aiding NYC Veterans.

As we now begin our walk phase, it would be helpful to breakdown our employment concentrations. Of our forty current employees, approximately forty-four percent (44%) are dedicated to the three programmatic lines of action; nineteen percent (19%) are agency-wide specialist; six percent (6%) are executive; and fourteen percent (14%) are administrative and operational support of the agency in areas such as budget, HR, and Legal Services.

DVS managed the contractual process for VetConnectNYC and Pay for Success initiatives. In light of our limited administrative capabilities, we owe our success for approval of these contracts to DCAS and MOCS as they provided invaluable advice and guidance to DVS through the procurement process. While DVS is currently exploring procurement methods for future initiatives, we are mindful of our current staffing. As we enter this new phase to better serve the

NYC veteran community, we continue to work with our OMB partners to address any operational and staffing lines which might be necessary.

Contract Management

Presently, each of DVS' current procurements have a staff member who takes on the role of project lead, in conjunction with their regular responsibilities. Because of the nature of the tasks, several DVS staff members, including Deputy Commissioner, Chief of Staff, Associate Commissioner for Public-Private Partnerships, General Counsel, Assistant Commissioner for Operations and Administration, Budget Manager and others, assist that individual in reviewing the contractual language, deadlines, correspondence, and other notable steps. As DVS increases its number of procurements we are working with OMB to address any operational and staffing lines which might be necessary to maintaining our internal contracts

DVS is committed to working with and assisting the number of Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) and their ongoing advocacy in NYC. While we have not been made aware of any issues currently affecting interactions between contracting agencies and VSOs, we take the suggestions and information presented by partners such as the New York City Veterans Advisory Board and the New York City Veterans Alliance deeply. As such, DVS is reviewing the most efficient ways to respond to any needs or issues the VSOs may have.

Conclusion

As DVS continues its upward trajectory into this next chapter, we will continue to expand on the work we've done this far as we seek new endeavors. We thank you for the ability to testify in the matter and look forward to addressing some of the topics discussed in the coming months. We are happy to answer any questions you, or the committee may have.

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Testimony by

James Fitzgerald
Deputy Director, NYC Veterans Alliance

New York City Council
Committees on Veterans and Contracts

Joint Hearing on

Oversight of Contracts for NYC Department of Veterans' Services

November 19, 2019

Thank you to Chair Deutsch, Chair Kallos, and Committee Members for this opportunity to testify today. My name is James Fitzgerald. I served nine years in the United States Army as an Infantryman with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. I received the Purple Heart and was medically retired due to injuries I sustained during combat in Afghanistan while serving with the 101st Airborne Division. I am newly appointed as Deputy Director of the NYC Veterans Alliance, a member-driven, grassroots policy advocacy and community-building organization that advances veterans and families as civic leaders. We work with community organizations across the NYC Metro area to promote events for veterans and families posted online at OurVeterans.NYC, our year-round online resource hub visited by more than 4,000 users each month. We also remain the only organization dedicated to local-level advocacy for veterans and families here in NYC. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to present testimony before you today.

There are two key issues we wish to bring to the attention of both Committees regarding contracting capabilities within city government to improve the lives of veterans and their families:

- 1. Ensuring that the NYC Department of Veterans' Services has the capability of managing contracts within the agency.** We strongly support contracting capability housed within the NYC Department of Veterans' Services. As we have stated in previous testimonies before the veterans committee and discussions with Chair Deutsch over the last two years, we strongly urge the Council to support and fund a dedicated Agency Chief Contracting Officer (ACCO) with specialized expertise in the city's contracting and procurement processes housed within DVS. We believe DVS would be enhanced by an ACCO with the right expertise, relationships, and sense of urgency when it comes to serving our veterans community. An example of why this capability is so needed in house is the long delay that took place during the three years prior to DVS bringing VetConnectNYC under agency management. In-house contracting and procurement expertise would likely have mitigated many of the issues and delays that occurred, which we hope never to see again. We urge the Council to ensure DVS has no delays on establishing and managing contracts going forward, as this is a necessary function of any independent agency within city government.

An ACCO would also bring the capability of providing meaningful oversight of discretionary funding from the Council to organizations serving veterans based on their expertise and knowledge of the veterans community. As you are aware, discretionary funding awarded to numerous organizations across the city for the purpose of serving veterans and families are currently overseen by agencies with little to no cultural competency in veterans' services, such as the Department of Youth and Community Development and Small Business Services. At a minimum, community organizations receiving discretionary funds from the

Council to serve veterans and families should be part of DVS's VetConnectNYC network for those services they provide, and be a robust part of the city's growing support network for our veterans community.

- 2. Prioritizing veteran-owned businesses in city contracting.** Going back to 2015, we have many times called upon the Council to establish priorities for veteran-owned businesses alongside the city's goals for contracting with minority and women-owned business enterprises (W/MBEs). In recent years, city, state, and federal government have invested greatly in veteran entrepreneurship programs, from NYU's Veterans Future Lab to Bunker Labs and many other great programs. Yet the opportunities and assistance for veteran-owned businesses with lucrative city contracts simply have not been open and available. Precedents for contracting preferences with veteran-owned businesses exist in federal and New York State government, and many cities, including Chicago and Los Angeles, support their veteran entrepreneurs by prioritizing them in government contracting.

We again urge both the Contracting and Veterans Committees to go beyond "thank you for your service" to our city's veteran entrepreneurs. Veteran-owned businesses could be included into the existing program for minority and women-owned businesses. Potentially, our city agencies could work toward the larger goal of prioritizing W/M/VBE priorities in city contracting.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. Pending your questions, this concludes my testimony.



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Statement to the Committee on Veterans
The Honorable Chaim M. Deutsch, Chairman

Thank you, Chairman Deutsch and the rest of the members of the Veterans Committee, for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm glad to be able to be here to share our thoughts on the contracting process for our Veterans' programs, and to share some of our insights on the challenges and opportunities that can be found within the contract implementation process.

GallopNYC has always felt very strongly about the benefits of therapeutic horsemanship for Veterans in New York City. Thanks to support from the City Council, and relationships within the NYC Veterans Community, we have made great strides towards expanding and enhancing our Veterans' programs over the past several years.

We are excited by the prospect of serving more Veterans in NYC, and excited by the prospect of developing and executing different programs that fit the needs of different veterans, and the needs of their families.

However, in order to successfully work with Veterans, we must collaborate with an agency that specializes in the needs of Veterans.

GallopNYC has been working with DYCD on our contract implementation. As you are aware, DYCD is an agency that does not exist explicitly for veterans - their mission is to engage the constituents of a community and focusing on youth is their priority.

Our contract management and implementation with DYCD has involved primarily conversations that are technical. These conversations surround current limitations on contracts, such as vendor or consultant approval or how expense reports are filled out. We would like to engage with our agency of oversight on a very substantive level, with a relationship based on collaboration and guidance, and not simply structure and process.

We feel strongly that such a relationship will allow GallopNYC to continue to offer programming that fits the needs of Veterans in New York City, today and as those needs change in the future.

Thank you for your time.

James Wilson
Interim Executive Director, GallopNYC

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