

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

----- X

March 23, 2021
Start: 1:05 p.m.
Recess: 3:32 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing (Virtual Room 3)

B E F O R E: Chaim Deutsch
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Aliko Ampry-Samuel
Mathieu Eugene
Alan Maisel
Paul Vallone

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

James Hendon, Commissioner
Department of Veteran Services

Cassandra Alvarez, Associate Commissioner
for Public-Private Partnerships
Department of Veteran Services

Quamid Francis, Chief of Staff
Department of Veteran Services

Coco Culhane, Executive Director
Veteran Advocacy Project [VAP]

Isabelle Muhlbauer, Senior Paralegal
Vet Practice
New York Legal Assistance Group

Cathy Cramer, CEO
Legal Information for Families Today
[LIFT]

Allison Messina, Vice President of
Workforce Development
Project Renewal

Joe Vitti, Director of Hospice Veterans
Project
Visiting Nurse Service of New York
[VNSNY]

Peter Kempner, Legal Director
Volunteers of Legal Service [VOLS]

Ashton Stewart, Manager
Sage Vets

Charlotte Martin, Senior Manager of
Access Initiative
Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum

Gary Bagley
New York Cares

1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

4

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon. Will
3 sergeants please start their recordings? PC
4 recording is started.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Cloud is underway.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Backup is rolling.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. And, good
9 afternoon and welcome to today's remote New York City
10 Council hearing of the Committee on Veterans. At
11 this time, would all Council members and Council
12 staff please turn on their video? To minimize
13 disruption, please place electronic devices on
14 vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to submit
15 testimony, you may do so at
16 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you, Chair. We are
18 ready to begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Good
20 afternoon. I am Chaim Deutsch, Chair of the
21 Committee on veterans of the New York City Council.
22 My colleagues and I are gathered here today for
23 fiscal 2022 preliminary budget hearing for the New
24 York City Department a Veteran Services. This
25 committee will be reviewing the fiscal 2022

preliminary plan and the fiscal 2021 preliminary the Mayor's Management Report, PMR for DVS. In doing so, we hope to have a meaningful discussion about how the Covid 19 pandemic continues to shape DVS' operation and an ability to serve veterans and their families across the city. The current status of and the need for greater accountability and the oversight of the agencies contracts and the role of Thrive NYC as it relates to DVS' mental health programming. The expense budget for DVS totals 6.1 million in fiscal year 2021 and 6.2 million in fiscal 2022. As of the cities preliminary plan, approximately one half of the agency's budget is comprised of central administration costs with another one third of budgeted agency spending allocated across community outreach, homelessness prevention, and Vet Connect NYC. The city continues to grapple with the fiscal consequences of the decreased economic activity associated with the Covid 19 pandemic. Accordingly, the preliminary plan denotes \$115,227 in savings at DVS in fiscal 2021 compared to a November plan from the city's hiring and attrition management program where in the city budgets a headcount reduction of five at the agency and approximately 5000 across

2 agencies. The fiscal 2021 PMMR captures significant
3 declines in numbers of veterans and their families
4 receiving assistance from DVS to access available
5 resources by 69 percent. The number of veterans
6 receiving homelessness prevention and assistance from
7 DVS by 24 percent. In the number of veterans from
8 whom housing was secured through the agencies Veteran
9 Care Coordinator, also known as VPC program, 58
10 percent between the first few months of fiscal 2021
11 and a comparable period last year. This is a
12 reminder of the challenges that Covid 19 presents
13 with regard to the agency's operations and, again,
14 underscores the importance today of better
15 understanding the agency's efforts to emerge from and
16 adapt to and learn from the program is impacts of the
17 pandemic. I look forward to the discussion today and
18 I want to thank my colleagues on this committee,
19 there is Department for Veteran Services, counsel,
20 legislative staff, Bianca Vitali, Thomas Ned, counsel
21 finance division, Jon Russell, and Jon Chang, and my
22 citywide veterans director, Joe Balogh, as well as
23 the members of the public for appearing this
24 afternoon to testify. As we all know, we are still
25 going through a very difficult time, so I just want

2 to take another moment to really thank those who are
3 there for our veterans each and every day. I want to
4 thank our Commissioner, the staff of DVS, all the
5 advocates for your ongoing efforts and for assisting
6 our veterans here in New York City. At this time, I
7 will turn it over to the moderator to administer the
8 oath. Thank you.

9 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. My name is
10 Thomas Nath and I am the policy analyst for the
11 Committee on Veterans for the New York City Council.
12 Before we begin, I just want to remind everyone that
13 you will be on mute until you are called on to
14 testify when you will be on muted by the host. I
15 will be calling on panelists to testify. Please
16 listen for your name to be called and I will be
17 periodically announcing who the next panelist will
18 be. For everyone who is testifying today, please
19 note that there may be a few seconds of delay before
20 you are on muted and we thank you in advance for your
21 patience. At today's hearing, the first panel will
22 be representatives from the administration followed
23 by Council member questions and then public
24 testimony. During the hearing, if Council members
25 would like to ask a question, please use the zoom

2 raise hand function and I will call on you in the
3 order in which you have raise your hands. I will now
4 call on members of the administration to testify
5 after the oath. Testimony will be provided by James
6 Hendon, Commissioner of DVS and the following
7 representatives will be available for answering
8 questions. Cassandra Alvarez, associate commissioner
9 for public-private partnerships and Quamid Francis,
10 Chief of Staff. I will now administer the oath. I
11 will call on you each individually for a response.
12 When you hear your name, please respond once a member
13 of our staff unmutes you. Do you affirm to tell the
14 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in
15 your testimony before this committee and to respond
16 honestly to Council member questions? Commissioner
17 Hendon?

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I do.

19 MODERATOR: Associate commissioner
20 Alvarez? If we could unmute associate commissioner
21 Alvarez, please?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: I do.

23 MODERATOR: Thank you. Chief of staff
24 Francis?

25 QUAMID FRANCIS: I do.

2 MODERATOR: Thank you, Commissioner. You
3 may begin when ready.

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Thank you. Good
5 afternoon, Chairman Deutsch, Committee member, and
6 advocates. As New York City appears to enter the
7 tail end of this pandemic, I urge our constituency to
8 stay safe, wear a mask, and get vaccinated if you are
9 eligible and have not yet done so. My name is James
10 Hendon and I am proud to serve as the Commissioner
11 for the New York City Department of Veterans
12 Services, or DVS. I am joined by Quamid Francis,
13 were Chief of Staff, and Cassandra Alvarez, our
14 associate commissioner for policy and strategic
15 partnerships. I welcome this opportunity to testify
16 about our budget, Vet connect NYC, housing, and
17 agency pandemic related programs. Following my
18 testimony, I welcome any questions that you may have.
19 Each new fiscal year presents the opportunity to take
20 stock of how far we have come, examine the city's
21 resources, and make decisions that ensure that we can
22 continue delivering the support that our
23 approximately 200,000 veterans and their families
24 have come to rely on. We are confident that the
25 upcoming budget discussions will translate into a

2 sound financial plan that will enable DVS in the city
3 of New York to provide our veterans with the
4 necessary services they require, further cementing
5 our position as a national model for how to best to
6 locally served those who have defended our country
7 and protected the freedoms that we enjoy. Since our
8 last budget hearing, much has changed. Despite this,
9 our agency, like the people we serve, persevere.
10 Last year DVS was actively working to fill our
11 daughter remaining vacancies which can authorize the
12 strength of 49 employees with a projected budgeted of
13 \$6.1 million. Now, our agency is allocated for a
14 lesser headcount, but in an increase in our budget by
15 approximately \$247,000. Regardless of these changes,
16 DVS stands committed to improving on this success of
17 our unique programs and services while increasing our
18 outreach to more veterans in the city to better
19 inform them of who we are and how to best access our
20 services and benefits. As I said last year during
21 this time, we commit ourselves to work smarter by
22 effectively managing resources, staff, and time to
23 deliver verifiable, evidence-based outcomes. The
24 updates I intend to provide within this hearing stand
25 as a testament to that. During our last hearing, we

2 spoke about the Vet Connect NYC transition into an
3 in-house platform. In transitioning this platform,
4 we carefully weighed the concerns and issues raised
5 by nonprofit partners, the Council, and constituents
6 while maintaining the quality of services veterans
7 have become familiar with. In September 2019, DVS
8 began to track, imitate, and evaluate the growing
9 concerns identified by our constituency. While
10 constituents were overwhelmingly happy with the
11 services provided, similar things continued to emerge
12 regarding room for improvement. One common theme was
13 accessibility. While constituents or grateful for
14 the platform and its wide range of services, we found
15 that some service providers were no longer taking on
16 additional clients which resulted in service delays.
17 In some circumstances, providers, due to various
18 reasons, were unable to take on additional clients
19 for an undisclosed time, thereby confusing our
20 constituents and delaying services. Despite this,
21 DVS continued to triage the platform, ensuring that a
22 reasonable and satisfactory alternative was available
23 to our constituency's benefit. Since transitioning
24 this program in-house, DVS has expanded the number of
25 unique service providers and can more greatly monitor

2 active provider status. Also, while the number of
3 service requests continue to improve, the price was a
4 growing concern. First highlighted by a nonprofit
5 partner in 2019 and later amplified by other groups,
6 the Vet Connect NYC price of \$514,000 seems
7 disproportionate to the number of service requests
8 resolved within a given year. This message,
9 throughout the years, only resonated more as our city
10 entered the pandemic. Moving forward, DVS can
11 maintain the platform at a fraction of the cost.
12 Lastly, and concern raised by the Council was DVS'
13 accessibility and maintenance of the data. Now, DVS
14 can better maintain constituent data, highlight
15 applicable services, and, most importantly, gather
16 the insight necessary as we move into our new chapter
17 as an agency. As I stated when I first came into
18 this role, a goal of mine is to get hands-on with our
19 people. Through this transition, we are closer to
20 that goal. Moving into this new chapter, DVS is
21 trained, equipped, and empowered several staff
22 members independently and efficiently manage the care
23 coordination center. In a few short months, DVS hit
24 the ground running. Since October 1 of 2020, we have
25 resolved over 524 individual service episodes in

2 areas such as housing and shelter, benefit
3 navigation, mental health, and education. Further,
4 through this transition, we have significantly
5 increased our number of service providers to 115, 14
6 of which are mental health and support organizations.
7 As we continue this journey, we look forward to
8 maintaining the care and attentiveness veterans have
9 come to expect when you saying that That Connect NYC
10 platform. Housing homeless veterans is one of the
11 foundational pillars of this agency. Even during the
12 pandemic, which DVS understands has created greater
13 housing insecurity, DVS continues to actively house
14 homeless veterans to ensure that they are in safe,
15 secure housing. While our veteran peer coordinators
16 are no longer working in the city shelters, they
17 continue to their important work to house veterans,
18 albeit under different circumstances. For example,
19 house viewings and interviews were shifted to virtual
20 modes. Videos of available units were shared and
21 management companies opted to complete phone or video
22 call interviews with potential veteran applicants.
23 If virtual options were not sufficient, our veteran
24 peer coordinators, or VPCs, would safely conduct
25 physical inspections of units, pickup and drop-off

2 documentation, and assist with the veterans move.

3 Through these efforts, DVS has found notable

4 successes. Since the start of this fiscal year, we

5 have housed over 100 veterans. This past November,

6 DVS staff housed 29 individuals, our second-highest

7 monthly amount in the past three years. To achieve

8 this goal, we have utilized existing programs such as

9 city FEPS, HUD VASH and VASH continue on providing

10 our constituency with various housing options.

11 Further, we have engaged and communicated with

12 landlords to expand the pool of housing options for

13 our veterans. Take, for example, the story of

14 veteran Jay. Veteran Jay was a Navy veteran referred

15 to DVS' HSS team in August of 2020 for assistance.

16 Veteran Jay was caught chronically and street

17 homeless having been on the street from June 2019

18 until he entered you see even location in July 2020.

19 Veteran Jay had a history of substance abuse in

20 recent remission. Due to the veterans means in

21 history of being in and out of homelessness, and

22 application was submitted for supportive housing unit

23 in the Bronx to support his transition from

24 homelessness to housing. Veteran Jay completed the

25 interview virtually via zoo and eventually was able

1 to move out in November on his own to his newly
2 furnished studio apartment. That DVS VPC who
3 assisted veteran Jay visited him a few times
4 afterwards to see how he was adjusting to his move
5 and he was happy to chat about his apartment while he
6 went about cooking in his own space. He was one of
7 three veterans able to move to a unit set aside for
8 disabled homeless veterans through the Empire State
9 supportive housing initiative and a brand-new
10 building in the Bronx. Or take for example, the
11 story of veteran T. Veteran T is a United States
12 Navy veteran that was residing in a shelter in
13 Brooklyn and facing a diagnosis of terminal illness
14 when referred to DVS. Since he was eligible for VA
15 medical services, the veteran was encouraged by his
16 assigned VPC to seek an enrollment into the HUD VASH
17 program which DVS assisted in getting him an
18 appointment. Following the screening, the VPC found
19 out that the veteran was denied by the program
20 stating he did not have a high enough need for
21 additional support for case management. After asking
22 the veteran some questions, the VPC realized that the
23 veteran did not see the challenges he faced then
24 refused to admit he needed help, denying that he
25

needed any support, which is exactly what the veteran told the interviewer is leading up to his denial.

This veteran's medical condition was debilitating for him which impacted many aspects of his life. Through support and advocacy, the VPC guided the veteran into recognizing his needs and counseled him to seek help.

The veteran was rescreened for the voucher. And, in light of his new insight, he was accepted for the voucher program in July 2020. The VPC referred him

to a studio apartment that offers on-site services and veteran support which he successfully moved into in October 2020. As we look towards our next

chapter, DVS will continue to work smarter resources available to New York City veterans such as city

FEPS, HUD VASH, and VASH continue on. Also, DVS will continue to engage and communicate with potential landlords to more effectively house our veterans.

There is no question that Covid 19 has impacted both the health and economic well-being of New Yorkers and the community organizations they belong to.

Organizations such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and so many others throughout the years have served as meeting places for veterans,

home away from home, and a shared space to reflect on

2 what it means to serve. To help alleviate some of
3 the financial burden faced by these organizations,
4 DVS launched the BSL microgrid initiative last fall.
5 Through the generous donations that have
6 philanthropic funders, 22 different veteran service
7 organizations that had lost rental revenue due to
8 being closed were each awarded a grant of \$1136.
9 While no amount can cover the economic toll this
10 pandemic has had, we are grateful to our partners and
11 the Mayors Fund for enabling us to provide a source
12 of support. We are also able to connect 35 more VSOs
13 to Home Depot gift cards to help pay for sanitizing
14 and general improvement expenses, thanks to the
15 generosity of the Home Depot foundation. We were
16 happy to hear that these efforts made a small
17 positive difference for our VSOs. Take, for example,
18 post commander Leon Usursky [sp?] of the Staff
19 Sergeant Michael Ollis post in Staten Island who
20 expressed his gratitude in receiving these funds in a
21 time of need. He wrote, thank you very much for your
22 help and assistance with getting this grant for our
23 post in this time of need. The Ollis post is named
24 after Staff Sergeant Michael Ollis, the 10th Mountain
25 soldier gave his life shielding a fellow

1 servicemember from a suicide bomber while deployed in
2 Afghanistan. Another organization expressed
3 gratitude by sharing that they purchased a toolbox
4 with a gift card. A toolbox that will help them
5 maintain a place that they call home. As I often
6 say, our goal as an agency is to make one plus one
7 equals three. By systems organization with the
8 recent purchase, we did just that. Another important
9 effort has been our facemask distribution. DVS met
10 the need for masks had on by distributing 38,000
11 facemasks to more than 50 different veteran serving
12 organizations, including the hospitals and vet
13 centers, supportive housing residences and shelters
14 and VSOs. We have even fulfilled requests for masks
15 from individual members of the community who were in
16 need. There is no task too small when it comes to
17 providing help to those who have served. All of this
18 work can be attributed to the power of partnerships.
19 During a time of need and scarce resources, DVS was
20 able to make a difference for our VSOs and members of
21 the community through like-minded partnerships that
22 share our values of service. I am proud to share
23 that our mission Vet Check outreach initiative is
24 still ongoing. Although the height of the pandemic
25

2 is, thankfully, behind us, its impact will be felt
3 for months and years to come. That is why we firmly
4 believe in continuing the effort to make direct
5 contact with our constituents. It is imperative that
6 they know they are not alone and that there are
7 resources available to help. To date, Mission Vet
8 Check has made approximately 28,000 calls to veterans
9 and their families with a 13 percent engagement rate.
10 This initiative has also connected 869 veterans that
11 information, resources, and services. Mission Vet
12 Check has also recently served as a conduit for
13 vaccine information as our volunteers are equipped
14 with helpful information from both the city and the
15 VA. Thanks to the help of the New York National
16 Guard, more than 12,000 calls were placed during the
17 darkest months of April, May, and June 2020.
18 Starting in July 2020, New York Cares volunteers
19 began supporting the project and, to date, more than
20 400 of their volunteers have supported Mission Vet
21 Check. The New York Cares volunteers who support
22 this initiative have been truly incredible. Some
23 have been making calls to our community every week
24 since our partnership launched in July because they
25 realize how much of a difference a simple, supportive

2 phone call can make in someone's life. Over the
3 course of two focus group sessions we recently held,
4 one volunteer expressed how grateful the veteran was
5 to hear from someone who was just looking to help. I
6 was praying that someone would reach out to me and
7 your call came just when I needed it, expressed Kai,
8 who has volunteered for the project for the last few
9 months. Another volunteer shared the following with
10 us: veterans have a unique voice and they need to be
11 heard. This pandemic. I think New York Cares for
12 creating this opportunity for volunteers to connect
13 to veterans with veteran services, especially now
14 with much uncertainty about our public health, our
15 economy, and our determination to achieve racial,
16 social, and economic justice. They have sacrificed
17 and served and we must do everything we can to give
18 them the support they deserve. We are fortunate to
19 partner with New York Cares and thank their
20 volunteers for enabling us to establish meaningful
21 connections with our veterans. These trusting
22 relationships position us to deliver services that
23 address vital needs such as food, employment,
24 financial, and VA benefits support. We are grateful
25 for the impact they have helped us make today. One

2 of the most significant concerns facing New York is
3 during the pandemic is food insecurity. To address
4 this need, DVS has partnered with A get Food NYC to
5 ensure that our veteran populations can access all of
6 the avenues through which the city provides food
7 assistance to New Yorkers. To support these efforts,
8 DVS coordinators received training and certification
9 as Get Food authorized in rollers and are assisting
10 veterans in navigating this program's requirements to
11 get food. Veterans can independently, or through one
12 of our DVS coordinators, submitted a food request
13 once every three days or two weeks of recurring
14 orders. Since the start of this program, DVS has
15 assisted 547 individual veterans with gaining access
16 to food. Our work to address food insecurity goes
17 well beyond Get Food NYC. Since the start of the
18 pandemic, DVS has collaborated with Hello Fresh to
19 support the states Nourished New York Initiative.
20 Through this collaboration, DVS works with various
21 organizations to distribute 350 to 400 hello Fresh
22 food kits to veteran households per week. Since the
23 program's launch, DVS has delivered 59,533 meal
24 pellets to have-- to veteran households. 18,000 in
25 this year alone. Further, in addition to the Hello

2 Fresh Initiative, DVS has also actively engaged with
3 the Bronx Food Initiative to deliver meals to hungry
4 constituents. Through this collaboration, DVS has
5 distributed 22,068 mailboxes to hungry New Yorkers
6 veterans and over 4500 mailboxes this year alone. As
7 we continue developing internal programs and
8 initiatives, DVS looks forward to collaborating with
9 outside organizations to combat food insecurity
10 facing our constituents. As we navigate the
11 challenges presented by the pandemic and beyond, DVS
12 will continue to build out and provide quality
13 services and information into the New York City
14 veteran community. And look forward to any questions
15 you or other committee members may have. Thank you.

16 MODERATOR: Thank you, Commissioner, for
17 your testimony. I will now turn it over to questions
18 from Chair Deutsch. If the panelists from the
19 administration would please stay on muted if possible
20 during this question and answer period. Thank you.
21 Chair Deutsch?

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very
23 much. And, Commissioner, just want to thank you for
24 sharing those stories of how DVS has touched the
25 lives of our veterans. Usually year at a hearing and

2 year the panel testifying and you don't hear when
3 other agencies come out and giving personal stories
4 of how their agencies impacted individuals. So, that
5 was a nice touch in your personal engagement in
6 individual cases is really special, so I want to
7 thank you for that. So, I just want to first speak
8 about-- actually, first I want to acknowledge my
9 colleagues who are here. Council member Alika Ampry-
10 Samuel, whose husband is a veteran. I also want to
11 acknowledge Council member Paul Vallone and Council
12 member Alan Maisel. So, my first question is DVS,
13 and the fiscal year 22 budget, is that sufficient to
14 fill the agency's responsibilities or do you
15 anticipate additional resources will be needed? And
16 we all know that we had a year-long pandemic which
17 probably, you know, made changes for many agencies in
18 the city of how they would have to work and see the
19 long term effect. So, do you anticipate a change in
20 the budget and how DVS is working during this
21 pandemic and how do we look after this project? What
22 is DVS role and goals in regards to the pandemic and
23 the budget?

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Thank you so much
25 for that question, Mr. Chair. I also want to

2 acknowledge Council member Ampry-Samuel, Vallone, and
3 Maisel also for being with us today. First off, just
4 to put it on the table, you know, we can always do
5 more with more just as far as resources go budget
6 wise. The way I look at it is it's important to know
7 that the birthday of this agency, we turn five years
8 old on April 8 of this year. So, you know, I always
9 tell folks to give us a birthday gift, if you would
10 like. But we are still in our infancy. And so, when
11 I look at not just the pandemic, but stepping back
12 from, you know, at 30,000 feet and looking at the
13 evolution, you know, it's always been about setting
14 us up and having the foundation to be what we are
15 ultimately to become. You know, on day one when it
16 was MOV A, you only had a handful of people and here
17 we are. We are at, you know, almost, you know, day--
18 you know, whatever 365×5 is. You know, day 2000 or
19 so and we are, you know, still evolving and still
20 growing. I feel as though the pandemic has put us in
21 a place where it very much made us mindful of what
22 the fundamental pillars need to be in this agency
23 going forward. And so, you know, when I think about
24 this from a budgeting perspective, you know, we are
25 constantly talking with OMB about what we need to do

2 to be able to continue to grow in a smart way, not
3 growing in an inefficient way. But also thinking
4 about, you know, what are the core pillars for how we
5 can serve our constituents in real time? Always
6 thinking about it in terms of, you know, the current
7 operations aspect or real-time needs that involve
8 typically food, housing, employment, healthcare with,
9 you know, how do we have a foundation that can
10 account for those areas? And when I think about what
11 is more of a strategic engagement piece of the long
12 term things that we need to plan on now, especially
13 with partnerships, with looking at other
14 opportunities beyond just city opportunities, and
15 with how to, you know, make sure we have got a
16 mechanism that can continue to build the appropriate
17 programs when needed to continue to evolve. So, you
18 know, really the best way to put this is we are
19 constantly growing. I think that the pandemic put us
20 in a place where we very much tighten down and say,
21 okay. We know this is a very important pillar that
22 we need to hold onto and continue to advance in the
23 coming years. And so, I just see this as a long
24 journey for us.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: You would think,
3 you know-- On a side note, you would think that at a
4 time when we are going through a pandemic, right,
5 people count on as now more than ever. Like before
6 the pandemic. It is very difficult to receive
7 services. I know the Mayor has announced that, in
8 September, about for low weight. I think it was 9000
9 employees to save \$21 million, when you are taking
10 those people who are supposed to work for the people
11 off the job, right, so you're actually reducing the
12 services of when people could reach out and when they
13 need assistance from the people who work for the city
14 of New York. So, you know, when we went through a
15 very difficult and it is more important now than ever
16 that we are here for the New Yorkers to, you know,
17 make sure that when they need services that we are
18 here to take care of them. You know, I know that the
19 unemployment, there was many issues of people getting
20 through to unemployment and they had no place to
21 turn. So, the only place they had to turn is to the
22 elected officials were to the employees and there was
23 also a time when thousands of New York City employees
24 were furloughed so that when you would call up to try
25 to get a hold of someone, I'm sorry. I am furloughed

2 today. I can't talk to you today. And I think that,
3 you know, yes, we do need to save money, but we also
4 need to make sure that we are there and the employees
5 of New York City are there for the people of New York
6 City in their time of need and especially now during
7 the pandemic. Now, is there any new initiatives that
8 the department plans to implement to improve
9 operation now that we are still working virtually?
10 And we don't know how much longer it's going to be.
11 So, is there any future plans on how to improve
12 operations? Like you did mention that there is
13 always more we can do. So, what is that board that
14 you think that-- What is your vision of there is
15 more that can do in order to have better give people
16 access to resources? And reach out for help?

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: When I think about
18 it, it has been able to have both the-- Covid
19 changed everything as far as access to resources for
20 people and I love that we are able to support our
21 constituents remotely even right now even through
22 everything that has happened. You know, we are still
23 able to process service-connected disability claims
24 for folks. We are still able to, you know, get food
25 delivered to people who have that need. We are still

2 able to help our veterans in the shelter system get
3 housed and I think that, when I think about
4 operational, you know, just evolution, it is
5 maintaining, as we returned to work and as we come
6 back and we have the in person presents to maintain
7 what we have done very well in the virtual side to--
8 in addition of the virtual outreach. So, I just look
9 at it is, you know, Margie in the pre-Covid
10 performance and execution and commitment to that was
11 in person with what we have been doing since March of
12 last year as far as really mastering and being able
13 to do this in a remote way so that we can meet our
14 people wherever they are need wise, Mr. Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How many full-time
16 employees does the agency currently employed?

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Our count-- and I
18 can defer to Quamid Francis, Chief of Staff to get
19 more in the weeds of it. Our authorized strength is
20 44. We currently have 39 on staff.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. What are the
22 attrition rates for the department as a whole? So,
23 you have 39 now out of 44. So, is there an attrition
24 rate of like how many people would leave--

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: all started then I
3 will pass it over to Quamid to finish on this one.
4 As an agency, we have been growing, so we have been
5 in this position where the authorized strength is
6 higher, but the count hasn't caught up to the
7 authorized strength yet. And so, we were in that
8 spot just before the pandemic hit where the
9 authorized strength the was at a higher level than
10 what our headcount was and then everything was paused
11 as far as hiring on account of the pandemic. So, I
12 just want to put it in that context and as far as
13 what is going on. And, Quamid, I don't know if you
14 want to add anything to that?

15 QUAMID FRANCIS: Yeah. Thanks,
16 Commissioner, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for that
17 question. I think-- you know, I think you hit on
18 it, Commissioner. Nothing much further to add except
19 to just double down on the fact that our Christian
20 rate really only has been stable over the course of
21 the year and so, that is, you know, our service
22 offerings and programs, everything has been
23 relatively stable for the most part and, you know,
24 we've actually increased a lot of our service
25 offerings and programs over the course of the year,

2 you know, which was, you know, needed because of the
3 landscape of the Covid pandemic. And so, you know,
4 everything has relatively been stable. No
5 significant changes on that front.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I want to go into
7 mental health. I want to talk about mental health.
8 First of all, when any veteran reaches out to Vet
9 Connect, when a veteran reaches out to DVS, if they
10 don't receive the services, if they are unhappy with
11 whatever services or those services are not taking
12 care of-- like sometimes I would get any malware
13 what is from a constituent saying, you know, I have
14 emailed you before and I'm not happy and I would like
15 to bring this to your attention and then I would get
16 involved and then make sure they take care of it as
17 best as, you know, as best as I can. Now, if, during
18 the pandemic, if a veteran reached out to DBS or any
19 provider, would you get feedback of that information
20 that, if a veteran did not fully get the resources
21 that they called about and they are still in limbo
22 and they still need to get something done, would you
23 get that feedback?

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm going to start
25 and then I will pass it over to Associate

2 Commissioner Cass Alvarez on this one. This is one
3 of the key pieces of why we are so happy to have the
4 Vet Connect platform in-house as far as the care
5 coordination unit and being effectively like where
6 that center of gravity for these referrals, as they
7 come in. So, you know, anyone who does come through
8 Vet Connect, they ultimately-- it is triaged by
9 folks from our Care coordination Center and then we
10 determined who we would referred them to. For
11 instance, there are 14 different healthcare providers
12 on the platform, as an example. Between that and the
13 ability to follow up with the veteran, you know, once
14 they finish, we have more data, more access to the
15 data we might not have otherwise had pre-October of
16 2020 we made this transition. And so, it is
17 something where we've got a better handle on if
18 someone has that kind of feedback. The loop is
19 closed directly because it is no longer asked
20 receiving this information from another source, but
21 it is coming directly through us. But I don't know,
22 Cass, if you can add anything to that.

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: Yeah.
24 Absolutely. And thank you so much for the question,
25 Mr. Chair, and salutations to the other members of

2 the committee you have joined us today. So the Unite
3 Us platform that our care coordinators use has
4 mechanisms built-in so that they can see feedback
5 from clients and from providers. We also just
6 conduct regular assessments to assess the quality of
7 the services provided from our clients. As the
8 Commissioner mentioned, us playing the role of care
9 coordination has a huge impact on all of this. We
10 have a direct established line of communication with
11 each of our clients now, personalized relationship
12 with them. So, if there any issues, our clients are
13 always more than welcome to reach out to our care
14 coordinators who can also troubleshoot. So, we have
15 a few lines of feedback where that information can be
16 shared.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Have you received
18 feedback like throughout the pandemic? Like how many
19 people called who were not satisfied or needed more
20 help? Who ran into obstacles during Covid?

21 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: We don't
22 have that information prepared for today, but we can
23 get back to you with further details about things
24 that might have been brought to our attention.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Can you talk
3 about, Commissioner, about United NYC? So, first,
4 we had Vet Connect, right, and then the was
5 changeover. So, can you talk about the transition of
6 what United NYC is?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yes. So, Mr.
8 Chair. So, Vet Connect NYC platform is a, you know,
9 online one-stop location where veterans who have
10 certain needs can reach out and, through the
11 technology provided by Unite Us, touch base with DVS
12 and be connected to one of 115 different service
13 providers to help triaged whatever their needs are.
14 As of October 1, it went from a situation where DVS
15 would work with our good friends at IVMF or
16 [inaudible 00:36:43] Veteran Military Families at
17 North well Health, to manage this platform that Unite
18 Us runs to it being something that is run by DVS. It
19 came at good savings to the agency. Also, we believe
20 the efficacy just in this example we just talked
21 about as far as just data and feedback was improved
22 by us having that control point there. As far as Vet
23 Connect and Unite NYC-- So, Unite Us, which is--
24 Think of them as the software. The digital platform
25 that allows us to meet our mission digitally with

2 folks who reach out to us there. Unite Us also has
3 another platform that was known as Unite NYC which
4 had another group of service providers who were
5 tangential to those we had on Vet Connect. Once we
6 took over operating the Vet Connect contract or the
7 That Connect platform, we effectively said, you know,
8 well, let's be able to talk with those who are in
9 Unite NYC, as well. In Unite Us had no issues with
10 that. And so, you see now a situation where we have
11 115 service providers who are active within this
12 overall platform and, for the veteran, the way that
13 this impacts a veteran who uses it is there OR just
14 that many more opportunities for us to get that
15 veteran the appropriate assistance when they reach
16 out. Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, first, what
18 period did DVS monitor the Vet Connect that DVS took
19 responsibility for monitoring the information?

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, we took over
21 Vet Connect on October 1st and then we took over the
22 broader version, Unite NYC, effective February 1st.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: When you say take
24 it over, what do you mean by taking it over? It's
25 being monitored by DVS?

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That is correct.
3 It's being monitored. So, if you go to Vet Connect
4 NYC.org or also you can go to NYC.gov/vetconnect--
5 So, if you go to NYC.gov/vetconnect, when you input
6 your inquiry and as far as requesting a need for
7 services, the person on the other hand who is going
8 to see that inquiry and triaged it is going to be one
9 of us. Prior to October 1st, it was someone from
10 North well Health.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: What was the cost
12 of the Vet Connect?

13 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Vet Connect-- In
14 total, we had spent \$964,000 on vet connect in total.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: In total. And he
16 moved it over to your agency and then what was that
17 cost? Like what would you estimate that cost to be?

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So the cost is--

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: You would have to
20 have staff from DVS to monitor that. Right?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That is correct.
22 So, now we-- Remember. Of the pieces of Vet Connect
23 before we still have the digital component of it
24 which is Unite Us, and so we have a contract with

2 them where that is \$175,000 per year to be able to
3 license and utilizing that software platform.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And what was the
5 price tag on Vet Connect to monitor? You said that
6 960--

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: The Vet Connect
8 annual price tag was 514 per year.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Was 514.
10 And then when you moved it over now to United NYC,
11 right?

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That's correct.
13 Now it's-- So, it is still Vet Connect. It is 175K
14 per year now.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, there's savings
16 over there. And this was a savings from DVS'
17 budget?

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: This was the
19 situation of money that was otherwise spent on the
20 larger contract is now spent on-- as a lesser amount
21 as far as for the execution of Vet Connect NYC.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And that was part
23 of the 6.2? The agency's budget cost?

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: This was-- Yeah.
25 This was a savings-- That's right. So, specifically

2 to Vet Connect, this came from that, yes, and there
3 is a savings of 67 percent as far as between what we
4 once paid and what we pay now for Vet Connect NYC.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And what is the--
6 So, how long has this been part of United NYC?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, this has been
8 since February 1st, Mr. Chair, as far as Unite NYC.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Since February 1st.
10 and how do we know how it's being monitored and
11 comparison to when DVS monitored or when Vet Connect
12 monitored--

13 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I want to clarify
14 that. DVS is always monitoring. It is more saw that
15 when you think about the Unite NYC, it is just we
16 have more service providers now. That is the
17 essential change is that there are more service
18 providers whom we can refer our veterans to
19 ultimately. So, since October 1st, DVS has managed
20 the That Connect NYC system. And then, when you
21 think about that merger with the Unite NYC, all that
22 means is that we went from having approximately 80
23 service providers to 115 service providers. But,
24 still, the action of who is going to refer this

2 veteran to this provider, etc., that is under the
3 hands of DVS.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And how did it go
5 from 80 providers to 115?

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, when we covered
7 down on the Vet Connect platform, they had
8 approximately 80. Once we emerged with Unite NYC
9 platform, that brought the total to 115.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, unite NYC had
11 their own providers previously?

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That's correct.
13 They had their own providers who served tangential
14 areas where our veterans have needs. That's right.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, it made sense
16 regarding the savings and also expanding the
17 providers, right?

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And I want to--
19 That's correct. There was an additional price placed
20 upon us to expand and have these additional
21 providers. And, just to clarify, you know, Unite NYC
22 is the broader NYC network and Vet Connect joined
23 that broader network. Think of us as having an
24 insular system with just our 80 service providers
25 before and, once we tapped in to Unite NYC, now there

2 were 115 total providers that we could access and put
3 our veterans in touch with.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, what is a
5 comparison to when Vet Connect was the provider and
6 now Unite NYC-- What is the difference of how many
7 veterans were served? Like what do you see the
8 difference of that? And before you had 80 providers
9 and now you have 115 providers. So, how do you see,
10 when you compare it, how do you see the difference of
11 how many people were served by Vet Connect and now
12 how many people are being served by United NYC now
13 that you went from 80 to 115?

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: A couple of things
15 I want to add to. The other piece of it-- And we
16 talk about pre-and post. The comparison is, prior to
17 October 1, DVS, we weren't behind-the-scenes as far
18 as running the care coordination center. So, if
19 someone sent something into the Vet Website before
20 October 1st, it wasn't a DVS person dealing with
21 that. It was our friends at North well before. From
22 October 1st forward, it has been someone at DVS. So,
23 when we draw that line in the sand, if you look at
24 the seven months from, you know, March to October
25 1st. so, really, if we take it from when the

2 pandemic first began, you know, say March 17th is
3 when things were declared as far as being the state
4 of emergency. You go from March 17th to October 1st
5 and you're looking at 414 folks who we assisted
6 through Vet Connect NYC. This is prior to us taking
7 the helm of the vehicle. 414 people. If you count
8 it from October 1st to the present, it is 524 people.
9 And so, you know, we have seen just more efficacy, if
10 you will, since we have had this transition. We've
11 seen more utilization is a better word.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And where do these
13 providers come from? Are they New York City
14 providers? Like, if you had 80 before Vet Connect
15 and now you're jumping to 115, like where were these
16 providers when DVS was still with Vet Connect?

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm going to defer
18 to Cass to give an answer on that because I know
19 that, at the end of the day, all of these providers
20 were on the same sheet of music were providing
21 service to New York City constituents who have needs.
22 I can say that. But, as far as where each one
23 individually is from, I can't speak to that at this
24 time. I don't know if, Cass, if there's anything you
25 would like to add to that.

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: Yeah.

3 Absolutely. So, the providers that were part of the
4 Vet Connect NYC network stemmed from the New York
5 Service model of the program which was the
6 predecessor for Vet Connect NYC and still serves
7 throughout the country as America Serves network
8 which is a veteran specific care coordination
9 network. So that's why Vet Connect NYC had access to
10 that grouping of providers. When we broadened the
11 service provider network by opening up Vet Connect
12 NYC to Unite Us NYC, that's where all those other
13 providers came from. So, they were part of the Unite
14 Us NYC platform and they were using that system to
15 service New Yorkers. Many of them are New York City
16 based organizations. Many of them are national
17 organizations and have offices in New York City. So,
18 that is sort of where that growth came from. These
19 are all still guided service providers that all have
20 expertise and training in their respective areas to
21 offer quality services. We just kind of opened up
22 the channels to enable our veterans to have access to
23 a broader range of different providers which we think
24 would be really beneficial to the community.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And why is it such
3 a big difference between the price on Vet Connect and
4 the price on how much Unite NYC-- the cost of unite
5 NYC is? That is a huge difference, right? By having
6 Vet Connect, you said it would cost 514,000 The
7 year.

8 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I want to, just to
9 be clear, the way that Vet Connect was run before
10 October 1st, you had-- you know, we had contracted
11 the care coordination responsibility out effectively.
12 So, the overall project management was handled by
13 Institute Veterans and Military Families and the Care
14 coordination Unit was run by North well Help. The
15 digital component was Unite Us. Once we got past
16 October 1st, the digital component is all that was
17 left and we dealt with managing all other pieces of
18 it. And so, it's almost like you had this vehicle
19 and we had someone else driving the vehicle up until
20 October 1st and then we said, okay. Look, we will
21 drive this vehicle. And so, a lot of the savings
22 come from us having internalized in the care
23 coordination aspect of this.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But the people in
25 DVS, the staff in DVS, who have oversight on this,

2 like what positions did they have before that now
3 they had the time to monitor United NYC?

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, we took
5 constituent services staff and inhabit them in this
6 role. And so, you have folks who were involved in
7 assisting our veterans already in a different way now
8 kind of behind-the-scenes on that vehicle to make
9 sure that when the requests come in through Vet
10 Connect, things can be triaged appropriately. And
11 like we were already-- This is work that we were
12 already doing. It's just now this is an added piece
13 of it, basically.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I will give it to
15 my colleagues to ask some questions. I see Council
16 member Vallone as his hand raised.

17 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. Yes. We
18 will turn it over to Council member questions at this
19 time. I will call on Council members in the order
20 that they have used the zoom raise hand function. If
21 you would like to ask a question and have not yet
22 used the zoom raise hand function, please do so now.
23 We are asking the Council members to please keep your
24 questions to five minutes. The sergeant-at-arms will
25 keep a timer and will let you know when your time is

2 up. You should begin once I have called on you and
3 the Sergeant has announced that you may begin.

4 First, we will hear from Council member Vallone.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you very
7 much, Chair. Good afternoon, Commissioner, and your
8 team. It's always a pleasure to see you. And,
9 honestly, this is our eighth year now and I think the
10 Council members who are on this committee and no
11 one's that were all in the previous committee are
12 looking back with pride on how many steps we have
13 taken together from where we were eight years ago to
14 where we are today with our very own DVS and an
15 agency that is grown and, under your stewardship, we
16 are very proud on how our veterans now are treated in
17 New York City with respect and dignity. And we thank
18 you for that. It is budget time, so we, as Council
19 members, we are here to lobby and advocate for every
20 veteran and every dollar that we can get. So, the
21 chair has been going over diligently with that. So,
22 you know, use as for that ability to fight for those
23 extra funds and every dollar we can. So, with that,
24 I think-- And you may have started in the beginning
25 and I apologize. Do we have-- because I know the

2 numbers have declined, but do we have a number of the
3 amount of veterans in 2021 that are currently
4 residing here in New York City?

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We do. I want to
6 couch this with the most recent-- This is based on
7 the most recent ACS, you know, American Survey five
8 year estimate as far as-- and I want to split it, as
9 we have done in the past where there are the veterans
10 that the Census Bureau tracks and then we have to go
11 to the Department of Defense regularly to get account
12 of the active-duty, the National Guard, the
13 reservist, and something else called a gray area a
14 retiree. That is someone who is retired from
15 National Guard or reserves, but haven't begun to draw
16 their benefits yet and so that is a different group
17 that is not counted for by the Census Bureau. Based
18 on the 2019 five year estimate, there were 150,924
19 veterans. Just veteran people no longer serving in
20 any way, shape, or form. 150,924 veterans in New
21 York City. That is ACS 2019 five year estimate that
22 was published a few months ago and now the DOD data,
23 which we last received, the last count we have is
24 2019. So when we get numbers from DOD their count is
25 at 58,095 in that other category. Another category

2 is the active-duty, it's the National Guard, it's the
3 reservists and so it is gray area retirees who live
4 in the city of New York, you know, Council member
5 Vallone. I am in this group. I am a drilling
6 reservist, so I'm not included in the ACS count of
7 150924. I'm included in the DOD count of 58095.
8 This brings the total count as of today from what we
9 have to 209019 as population number goes. 209019.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I So,
11 Commissioner, is that-- and those overall resources
12 provided to you. Has there ever been a requirement
13 or something that we-- I know we have talked about
14 it. I know we included on the New York ID to have a
15 veteran listed which wasn't included in the
16 beginning, but I always wanted, whether any city
17 agency should be given that information from every
18 other city agency and so many veteran services cross
19 platforms with other inter-agencies, right? So,
20 whether it is our seniors with DIFTA, whether it is
21 DHS with homeless, whether it is landlord-tenant
22 services that DVS must be notified of any veteran
23 that comes to that agency? Like do you have a
24 complete total of veterans receiving services through
25 city agencies?

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We don't have the
3 count now, but I am so proud and happy to report that
4 just a few weeks ago the Mayor signed an executive
5 order whereby now constituent facing organization,
6 not just DVS, but any city agency that faces
7 constituents is to ask a question to affirm veteran
8 identity. In other words, you know, have you served
9 in the US Armed Forces at any point? And so, we will
10 start to get that information. This goes back to the
11 narrative you said about where we have come in these
12 past eight years and what it is looking like. So,
13 just want to credit you with other members of the
14 Council, too, for advocating on this and so, was just
15 recent--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So,
17 Commissioner, we that Executive Order, you are going
18 to get that data? That's my point. It's like it's
19 tough to advocated fight for more unless we have that
20 exact number. So, you've got this omnibus of city
21 agencies all over the place. I've always wanted to
22 make sure, if I was sitting in your chair, I'd want
23 to know that every veteran has applied for service
24 within New York City and any agency besides the total
25 number of veterans living in the city. So, you have

2 two. You have total veterans in the city and then
3 you have veterans seeking services. So, will that
4 executive order provide you with that confirmation
5 data finally now of how many veterans are actually
6 applying and receiving city services?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We believe it will.
8 And I want to couple it, as well so like just give
9 credit to that Small also. If you think about the
10 local Law 23 which also requires data numbers, you
11 know, for agency functions that pertain to
12 interacting with veterans--

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: and you think about
15 this, you know, between the executive order that
16 recently put out where this question most appear on
17 those constituents facing agencies, hey, have you
18 ever been a member of the US Armed Forces? That
19 piece. And then we look at this local law where this
20 type of data must already be gathered and we are
21 currently working, you know, agency by agency to get
22 agreements ironed out to be able to collect the data.
23 It's one of those things where we are taking one step
24 at a time towards that, but it is going to the right

2 place and exactly where you want to go and where I
3 want to go on this issue.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And, Mr.
5 Chair, the last question.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Take your time.
7 You can take another few minutes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah. Because
9 these are great. I mean, we have starting with that
10 platform that builds how we can provide services and
11 fight for the budget. So, it took some time just to
12 get that. But, I mean, if the Executive Order-- and
13 I'm sure the Chair the other Council members, we can
14 put in any bill that would require. I want to make
15 sure that you have that data every year so we can
16 grow with that, especially now during post pandemic,
17 right? Because now, we, as a city are now
18 transforming into the services we provide to get
19 through the pandemic, post pandemic, and then beyond
20 and veterans have their own unique needs and demands
21 within that also. So, there was the world pre-
22 pandemic and now the world we are in now and the
23 budget is flowing around that also. So, you
24 mentioned now the combination of the Vet Connect with
25 the Chair and United NYC merger and is over 100 now

2 nonprofit providers. How does, in this grand, I
3 guess, scheme, how does DVS interact with the
4 procurement and the contract process that the
5 nonprofits are either submitting the bids for or
6 submitting services for? What is DVS role in
7 assisting those providers and obtaining contracts and
8 getting the funding?

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I want to make sure
10 I understand this. Is this about Vet Connect and the
11 service providers on Vet Connect?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I mean,
13 either because, I mean, it's the New World now that
14 they have merged. So, if there is any veteran
15 provider or nonprofit provider and the procurement
16 process, what does DVS' role in the procurement
17 process? Do you have a contracts personnel or
18 division or do you would assist in any way? Because
19 navigating that system, no matter what agency it is,
20 is very difficult to do. Is DVS a part of that?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I am going to defer
22 to Cass Alvarez, associate commissioner for strategic
23 engagement to answer a lot of that. I want to just
24 start by saying that on this issue of contracts and
25 helping our nonprofits in general, it is a need in

2 our community that we very much hear and we are very
3 much sensitive to as far as how we can be able to add
4 value their and that was one of the roles that we had
5 been in the process of hiring for right before things
6 froze with the pandemic. So, this is something that
7 is-- you know, speaking to you as someone who has
8 seen this thing since before there was a DVS, you
9 know, this is still something that is evaluated wants
10 as far as being able to provide that. And I spoke to
11 long-term what we see the agency looking like and
12 being able to assist our nonprofits in that way is a
13 piece of the puzzle, but I want to defer to associate
14 commissioner Alvarez for anything else on this area.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah. And if
16 there is any extra budget that we need for that, that
17 might be something that we could fight for to make
18 sure you have that right staff to do that because I
19 think that is an essential component navigating that.
20 Of obstacles in order to get the funding. Sorry,
21 Cassandra. I didn't mean to cut you off.

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: No.
23 That's okay. Thank you so much, Council member
24 Vallone. The only thing I would add to that is that
25 we have an ombudsman who has been assigned in our

2 office to help the veteran service organizations that
3 receive funding through the discretionary contracts
4 schedule C process. So, he makes himself available
5 to all of our veteran services organizations should
6 they have any questions about the contracting process
7 or in case they encounter any hiccups. He's there to
8 help them troubleshoot. He also does proactive
9 outreach to help in those situations.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But I would
11 still like to thank-- and I think we have spoken at
12 a time with that. We want to see that position at
13 DVS and I think the Commissioner just said that was
14 part of the vision before the pandemic and Covid and
15 OMB shut everything down. Do you think we can get
16 that position fulfilled this year? Because I would
17 love to be able to handoff and, when were done, say,
18 we have filled that need beyond an ombudsman. I
19 think a dedicated procurement contract staff at DVS
20 would be a huge advantage for folks to navigate. Do
21 you think that could be something done this year or
22 is that something in our next administration? I
23 would love to see that done with a dedicated staff.

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: You know, Council
25 member, I don't want to get ahead of talks that we

2 are having with OMB on these types of subjects. Just
3 know that we are very much sabbatical on it. I'll
4 say that. And, as I mentioned, we were literally
5 going through the interview process right before
6 things, you know, took a pause.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's good.
8 That's good news.

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: But I don't want
10 to-- so, you know, we are actively in talks with,
11 you know, folks internally on this issue, but just
12 know that we recognize how important this is to the
13 community and the longer term piece that this play is
14 in, you know, what you about, you and the Council and
15 others who are outside of the Council and have built
16 in creating this agency, we recognize how critical of
17 you know, our role that this is. And so, it's
18 something that is very important to us. I can say
19 that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And thank you,
21 Chair, for the extra time. And, if there is anything
22 else, Commissioner, with this year, I really want to
23 thank you, the staff, the Chair, and everyone who has
24 created something that never existed before, so we
25 all are all just trying to make this better each

2 year. I think these are all just pieces to a very
3 large puzzle and you've done the best that you can.
4 So, if we can help you make that even better to the
5 end of this year, please work with us. Thank you.
6 Thank you, Chair.

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: that Council member
9 Vallone mentioned in the absence of a contracting
10 officer. Cassondra, you just mentioned that DVS is
11 open to the community-based organizations in case of
12 any assistance. Did any community-based
13 organizations reach out to DVS that they are having
14 issues? Because I know that, all across the city,
15 many not for profits were having issues with the
16 contracts.

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: And not
18 any specific outreach through our ombudsman, but we
19 can verify that and get back to you in case there are
20 particular instances, but I can't speak on any at the
21 moment. No. No.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: All right. Because
23 we are having some not for profits, some community-
24 based organizations who are testifying to I remember
25 the last hearing two years ago we went through the

2 same thing and we had DYCD at one of the hearings and
3 they said, oh, yeah. We are taking care of
4 everything. And then when I heard from the
5 community-based organizations, they said, no. We
6 haven't had any outreach and were still having
7 problems. So, I think that's very important because
8 it's impressive how many more resources going from
9 Vet Connect and leaving Vet connect. But I think it
10 is very important because you have to know that the
11 initiatives in the city Council is almost half, if
12 not half of DVS total budget, operating budget. So,
13 it is so important for the is not for profits and
14 community-based organizations to go out there into
15 their work and without having that contract and
16 without having it streamlined. You know, and were
17 not even talking about streamlined. We are talking
18 about just getting it done, right? So, it is so
19 important that those not-for-profit are able to, you
20 know, not put a hold on their services because they
21 don't have the funding for it.

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Mr. Chair, I just
23 want to add, you know, you and the Council, committee
24 members, you help us by referring folks to us
25 whenever this occurs. Because, I know we been in the

2 community, as we mentioned before. We have, you
3 know, worked distributing micro grants to more than
4 20 of our VSOs, we got 25-- the rolling group of
5 about 25 that we use to help distribute food to our
6 homebound veterans every week and, you know, we have
7 distributed those 38,000 masks two different VSOs and
8 the Home Depot cards. We have got these touches. I
9 just worry that if someone thinks, okay. I've got
10 this money. It's counsel discretionary money, some
11 going to go back to the Council on this with my
12 issues. When people come to you, please let them
13 know they can reach out to us. They can call us. It
14 is 212-416-5250. They can email us. It is
15 connect@veterans.nyc.gov. You know, they can message
16 on the website NYC.gov/vets. Even on social media at
17 NYC veterans. We run a shop similar to the way you
18 run a shop in that if they reach out, were going to
19 take care of them and were going to hear about it,
20 but we just want to make sure that people know they
21 can come to us if they have these types of questions,
22 Mr. Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Yeah. So,
24 just like if someone has a-- If the community-based
25 organization has a problem, they call me, I have to

2 call DVS or send an email, whatever that case is.
3 We're going back and forth and working with three
4 different people. Three different community-based
5 organizations, the elected office, and the DVS. So,
6 that is why it is always-- it will always be easier
7 to have a contracting officer within DVS. This way
8 they know that, you know, DVS is responsible for that
9 opposed to going in dealing with five different
10 agencies.

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I don't disagree.
12 I think that, you know, during the pandemic, you
13 know, I understand what caused things, but I don't
14 disagree. I feel like this is-- we are building
15 something here, all of us, and it is important that
16 it have different pieces. We think this is a piece
17 and, you know, I hope that we can get to a place
18 where we can have more news on that front. Just know
19 that we are talking internally with the folks in OMB
20 and just staff wise to see what can be done here,
21 but, yeah. I don't disagree at all.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I want to talk
23 about housing and homelessness. On February 23 of
24 this year, the Mayor announced that his
25 administration has housed approximately 1000 as part

2 of the administration's continuing mission to house
3 veterans who have experienced homelessness. Now, how
4 many of the 1000 veterans were housed in the past
5 year during the pandemic?

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: It's been since
7 March 18, 2020-- March 17 is the day we had the
8 state of emergency declared. It's 126, yep, since
9 March 18, 2022 today. Mr. Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: March 18. And when
11 did the Mayor announced this plan?

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm sorry.
13 Announce which plan? I'm sorry. Is that when did we
14 start housing or is it--

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: November 6, 2015.
17 So, before we became an agency. But, November 6,
18 2015. So, when you want to account--

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, 1000 veterans
20 that were housed, that was from 2015?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: from November 6,
22 2015. Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: November 6, 2015.

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think it's
25 important to note that when you look at that, when

2 they first created DVS, understand we signed into law
3 in 2015 and we actually chartered officially on April
4 8, 2016 the first thing that was done is we took
5 bodies from the Department of Homeless Services,
6 combined them with what was then staff at MOVA, and
7 that was the initial piece of what would become this
8 agency. So, just wanted to give that in context and
9 why we kind of credit our first veteran housed from
10 November 2015.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: What is the
12 estimate of how many homeless veterans are Street
13 homeless and also how many are in shelters? How many
14 homeless veterans are in shelters?

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, the 2020 point
16 in time count-- This was the count taken on January
17 28, 2020, the numbers were just released by HUD this
18 month. Three unsheltered veterans in the city of New
19 York and 685 sheltered in the city of New York.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Three
21 unsheltered--

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yep. And 685 who
23 were sheltered.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: You're saying
25 there are three veterans--

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Three Street
3 homeless. Three Street homeless or unsheltered, as
4 it is termed and another 685 sheltered. So, those
5 who are in the shelter system.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, do we know why
7 the three who are unsheltered, why they are not in
8 shelter? Like what the reasons are?

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I can see that we
10 do. I can't say that right now directly. I know
11 that the Department of Homeless Services Street
12 homeless team is in touch with these individuals, but
13 prior to this count, it was six who were unsheltered
14 during the 2019 count and DHS maintains touches the
15 with these individuals. I can't speak to the reasons
16 why, but they have chosen to remain unsheltered. I
17 can't say that much for now, Mr. Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do you have anyone
19 on your staff who works with the homeless that could
20 possibly answer that?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Oh. So, you want
22 to know exactly why each of these three people is
23 still unsheltered is what you are saying?

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Because
25 this is from 2020, right? So, you have--

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That's right.

3 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Three unsheltered
4 and I just want to know where they are now. Are they
5 sheltered now or are they still unsheltered?

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Small, we can get
7 back with details on it, but I just want to be clear
8 that these are three who are-- First off, this is
9 captioned point time count. Secondly, the Department
10 of Homeless Services Street homeless team knows who
11 these jewels already and regularly engages them in
12 these are individuals who have chosen to remain
13 unsheltered. So, this is something where they have
14 chosen to be in that position. We can get more
15 information about it, but, yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Who is in charge of
17 these--

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Just for
19 perspective.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Who is in charge of
21 DHS?

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: As far as the
23 administrator for that Department of Homeless
24 Services?

25 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Oh. Jocelyn Carter
3 is the administrator or the person who is the
4 administrator for Department of Homeless Services.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And she was the
6 liaison to DVS?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Oh. No. No.
8 That's the person who is my equivalent as an agency
9 had for that group.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I understand. So,
11 if you have three unsheltered people on the streets
12 who are veterans and DHS knows who those three people
13 are--

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And regularly
15 checks and on those people.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. So, what
17 interaction does DHS have with DVS to say, okay, we
18 have three unsheltered veterans in the streets and we
19 know what's going on. None of your business, right?
20 You're DVS. I don't have to tell you. I don't have
21 to give you any information because we are DHS. But
22 that is unacceptable.

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think I see your
24 point.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, that is what I
3 want to know.

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That is not the
5 situation with DHS. It's not a situation where
6 someone is hoarding information. That's not the
7 case.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I know that. But I
9 want to know where are those three people now? If
10 this was in 2020 and you have three unsheltered
11 people, like if I had three unsheltered people in my
12 district that I went to visit where they are, right?
13 Or I knew that they are housed, then I would know
14 that they are right now in housing, not on the street
15 because I am following up with them and I know
16 exactly where they are. If DVS is-- the agency that
17 is taking care of veteran homelessness and, from 2020
18 you have three unsheltered people, like where is the
19 feedback? Like where are these three people now? I
20 want to know where these three people are and I want
21 to know--

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah. We can get
23 back to you on that, Mr. Chair. Absolutely. That is
24 no issue. We maintain robust conversations with

2 Department of Homeless Services. We can get back to
3 you with that. So, yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. Commissioner,
5 I don't have a question for you. I have a question
6 for DHS. Like why aren't they giving this
7 information to DVS and saying that, we sheltered
8 these three individuals or these three individuals
9 are unsheltered because we all know that Thrives NYC
10 is part of the DVS budget. Right? So, if it is a
11 mental health issue, then Thrive would step in and
12 work with the three unsheltered people, but DVS
13 should know-- DVS should get the information from
14 Thrives NYC or from DVS where these three people are
15 today and it shouldn't be I'll get back to you let me
16 find out. That is not my point. My point is that if
17 we are taking care of our veterans and were talking
18 about over 200,000 veterans and we tried to hold
19 accountability for every veteran out there that needs
20 services and we have three unsheltered veterans. So,
21 when we are dealing with thousands of people, why
22 don't we know where these three unsheltered people
23 are? That is my point. So, where is DVS and where
24 is Thrive NYC by getting this information over to DVS
25 of where these three people are? These are three

2 human beings. These are three people who are
3 unsheltered. So, I just want to know. Like today we
4 have the budget hearing and we would like to fight
5 for more resources for DVS. Whatever is needed and
6 what I am saying is that we don't know where the
7 three people are who have been living in the streets
8 since 2020. And that is what disturbs me. Is there
9 any way to find out by calling DVS now or by calling
10 Thrive NYC like where these three people are today?
11 Like where they are now?

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Mr. Chair, about
13 these three people and making sure they have the
14 appropriate services. I hear what you are saying.
15 You're saying if these people are unsheltered and
16 this is by choice, are we making sure if there any
17 mental health issues that those needs are being met?
18 And so, I assure you we will go back on that to make
19 sure we just circle back and give you a report in
20 general.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is there--

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And I think I hear
23 what you're saying there and that is we can get back
24 to you on that. That is not-- This is something

2 that can be done and I understand. I completely take
3 your point. So, yeah.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We keep on putting
5 more resources. We have a pilot program now for 911,
6 right, if someone needs mental health, right?
7 There's a pilot-- Are you familiar with--

8 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm sorry. One
9 other thing I wanted to just say, too, as this
10 information was published last week as far as the
11 point in time account and so it's not that like we--
12 you know, I just want to put that out also. We will
13 definitely get back to you as far as working and
14 getting information about those three people, but,
15 you know, I just want to put that out there that this
16 is-- You know, and I take your point. I just wanted
17 to say back. Sorry.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Because if you
19 have-- I just want to continue this is for another
20 few minutes. You have care counselors, right? So,
21 if you have three people who are unsheltered living
22 on the street and DVS and DHS comes back to you and
23 says, listen. We tried everything we need to do and
24 Thrive NYC comes back to you and tells you, we did
25 everything we needed to do, then, at that point, you

2 would probably send out one of your care coordinators
3 or care counselors to go out there in the streets,
4 right?

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: . That's why I
6 want us to do what we need to do here and get back to
7 you in general because I take the point completely.
8 I just want to say that. Yep.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: and DVS? It's like
10 600,000? About 600,000?

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I believe so, but I
12 want to defer to Quamid Francis to get us that
13 answer, our Chief of Staff.

14 QUAMID FRANCIS: Thanks, Commissioner.
15 And that is correct, Mr. Chair. It is 600,000.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: You didn't thank me
17 for the question. No. I'm getting. So, throughout
18 this pandemic, what did or like how did Thrive NYC
19 contribute to the mental health of our veterans?

20 QUAMID FRANCIS: Yeah. I'm happy to take
21 that, Commissioner. I think it's important to just
22 point out that, you know, mental health is built into
23 the ether those of what we need to at DVS and so,
24 programmatically, we know that engaging veterans and
25 addressing their basic needs, whether that is

2 housing, food, safety, job loss, transportation even,
3 that we are in a better position to the on ramp to
4 mental health resources and care through those
5 related mental health outreach efforts. So, through
6 the Thrive DVS partnership model, like we refer
7 individuals that we interact with to social services
8 and mental health resources in the community and,
9 through using the Vet Connect Unite us platform. I
10 think moreover the advent of Mission Vet Check
11 robustly enhanced our mental health service
12 capabilities. And so, I think I will defer to our
13 associate commissioner, Cassandra Alvarez who can
14 also talk more about the success of Mission Vet Check
15 in collaboration with Thrive.

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: Yeah.
17 Absolutely. Thanks, Quamid. And just to double
18 down, as Quamid said, mental health as part of the
19 ethos of our service delivery at DVS. Mr. Chair, I
20 know that you are familiar with the Mission Vet Check
21 initiative that we referenced during our last hearing
22 and have been promoting sense. That effort
23 continues. Thrive was our very close partner in
24 helping us build out that initiative and then
25 managing it in its early phases. And, to date, we

2 have worked with a lovely core of mentioned during
3 his testimony. And they have been very dedicated in
4 calling our constituents on a weekly basis. And,
5 thus far, we have placed over 28,000 phone calls to
6 the veteran community. So, that just is another
7 illustration of us doubling down to make meaningful
8 connections with our constituents.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Commissioner, I
10 want to go back to the three unsheltered veterans in
11 the street and I don't know if I could continue
12 without knowing where those three people are. Is
13 there any way possible for someone in your staff to
14 call up the DHS and just find out where they are?

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We will have
16 somebody work on it right now, Mr. Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Because I--
18 I can't into the hearing without knowing where these
19 three people are and I just want to know. I want to
20 know where they are. If they are still out on the
21 streets and, you know, because also, during Covid,
22 you have a different shelter throughout the city.
23 Some shelters have a capacity, let's say, 150 people
24 and, because of Covid, that number was reduced. So,
25 how do we know that there isn't more than three

2 people out there who are unsheltered since the
3 beginning of Covid that people were forced to go out
4 a shelter because of the pandemic and Covid?

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think what's
6 complicated about that is we know those who interact
7 with the city in some way, shape, or form. Like we
8 know who those veterans are. We say that will get
9 the information about the three because we can touch
10 base with DHS and their street homeless team to get
11 that information. So, we know that because those
12 people are on the radar. For someone who is not--
13 And a whole other issue I think that we have brought
14 up at a past hearing, you have veterans who don't
15 even self-identify. Who won't even tell people that
16 they have served. And so, were doing everything we
17 can within the realm of what we can see, including
18 things like the executive order we just talked about
19 with Council member Vallone. Including things like
20 there is this our own survey that we had been
21 promoting lately to try to get more veterans to get
22 us info so we know who our people are, but there are
23 just some areas where we, unfortunately, won't get it
24 because, you know, if someone does not say that there
25 a veteran or if someone does not interact with

2 anything that touches the city's ecosystem for
3 homeless support, then it may not cross paths with
4 us. We have been trying our best to triage--
5 Another suggestion you gave that we have been taking
6 also, Mr. Chair as we been reaching out actively to
7 community boards throughout the city so that they now
8 whenever they encounter anything more any, you know,
9 constituent who reaches out, that they contact us.
10 The same thing goes for mutual aid groups in the
11 city. Making sure that they know who we are to
12 contact us. And so, we are trying to turn the lights
13 on more to see what is in the room, but there are
14 still areas where there are some blind spots. I have
15 to say that.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. I want to
17 get to the advocates. I don't want to, you know-- I
18 just want to know about the three unsheltered
19 veterans. So, I just want to get an answer to that
20 if we could get someone to--

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We've got some
22 folks reaching out to DHS right now. You know, I
23 don't-- We can circle back to you as soon as we
24 hear--

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I want the public
3 to know where those three people are and then we
4 can--

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We are working on
6 it. I have to say that--

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: It's three people.
8 It shouldn't take too long.

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We're working on
10 it. We're not going to be sharing anybody's
11 personally identifiable information.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. No. No. I
13 just want to know if they are still on the street or
14 where they are. Can we just take like a five minute
15 break?

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: No problem, Mr.
17 Chair. Yeah. Thanks.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER HENDON: All right. Mr.
20 Chair?

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Hi. Yes.

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Okay. So the
23 administrator from DHS just got back to me and they
24 said they can't--

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [inaudible
3 01:29:54]

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: the information in
5 a hearing as far as-- they can't disclose the
6 information in the hearing. I want to work to get
7 you as much as we are able to beyond what she said
8 that we cannot disclose in a hearing, just so you
9 know, as far as the update on it.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: All right. So, say
11 what? Start again.

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm sorry. So, I
13 just connected with the administrator for Department
14 of Homeless Services and she just got back to me
15 saying, hey, we cannot disclose this information in a
16 hearing. She said I just checked and we cannot
17 disclose this information in a hearing.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: What information
19 can they disclose?

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Information about
21 the street homeless people about these specific
22 people. About the use street homeless people as far
23 as disclosing that information. I mentioned before--

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: One second.

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: too, just about the
3 amount of personally identifiable info. Happy to
4 work with you to get you information--

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. No. No.
6 Commissioner, I am not asking them for names and
7 addresses and Social Security numbers or anything
8 like that. I just want to know that if these three
9 people are still on the streets. Are these people
10 still unsheltered and what is being done about it and
11 if Thrive is involved. I'm not asking for personal
12 information.

13 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think that--

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: You know, when I
15 first had-- I don't know if you remember,
16 Commissioner. When I first had my first veterans
17 hearing in 2017, this administration told me-- I
18 asked the administration have my first hearing at the
19 homeless shelter and they told me that they can't
20 disclose the creation of the homeless shelter, so I
21 can't have my hearing at the homeless shelter. But
22 then when I googled the homeless shelter, the
23 veterans homeless shelter, I found it on Google and
24 then they agreed to let me have my first hearing at
25 the homeless shelter. So, when they are giving

2 information saying that they cannot give me or
3 disclose the information, not asking for personal
4 information. I just want to know what the reasons
5 are and why they're still on the street and what is
6 being done about it.

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: hear exactly where
8 you're coming from. We are trying to work to get
9 you--

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I tried calling
11 Commissioner--

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I feel like, you
13 know, splaying operator with DHS in the middle of the
14 hearing like we can work to get you this information
15 for you and the Council. I just want to, you know,
16 be mindful that were doing what we can to get it and,
17 just for perspective, we are trying to get this
18 number down to zero. It was 450 10 years ago, so we
19 are working in doing a great job here as far as our
20 street homeless veteran population. We are working.
21 Thanks to your support and others in the community to
22 get this number down and I want to be able to get you
23 in the Council members information on these three. I
24 just, right now, you know, just not able to do it
25 right now in real time, unfortunately.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Nicole Branca, she
3 would have had this information. I mean, she
4 would've had this information. She's been amazing,
5 Nicole. Do you have someone that does the housing in
6 DVS?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We have someone
8 who does the housing and what is funny is, you know,
9 Nicole is amazing. We will get those responses to
10 you. I just think Nicole, you know, he said the same
11 thing, as well, as far as, you know, we know who the
12 folks are in the DHS street homeless-- you know,
13 that homeless team that works with folks. We just
14 need to touch base with them to get the information.
15 Whenever Nicole needed this-- because I've asked
16 this of her before-- she is no longer here, but when
17 she was, I would ask it. She said, look, let me--
18 you know, I can reach out to the street homeless team
19 to get this information for you if need be as far as
20 so you have it. So, we want to do that same thing.
21 It's just to do it in real time like this, we just
22 need time to get that so we can get back to you, Mr.
23 Chair. That is all I am saying.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. But,
3 Commissioner, why would they tell you that they
4 cannot give information on a hearing?

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think it is the
6 idea of disclosing personal information and to--

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. I'm not asking
8 for personal. Who do you speak to and DHS?

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, I connected the
10 DHS. It's Jocelyn Carter and it's not about-- I
11 think they just want to make sure that anything that
12 is put out is filtered before this is put out in this
13 public forum as far as these details. They just want
14 to make sure that they--

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Did they tell you--

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: that nothing is
17 said that is-- You know, no one wants to misspeak on
18 these types of very sensitive issues.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Did they tell you
20 why DVS wasn't informed?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I did not ask. I
22 did not ask why DVS wasn't informed. You know, like
23 I said, you know, this is what these meetings are
24 for. It's free to say, hey, look. I need to know
25 certain things and when we say we will get back to

2 you with that information- I recognize it's not just
3 you, but you represent the public. And so, we want
4 to do that in the right way on the same sheet of
5 music with you. I just--

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I know that.
7 Commissioner, it's not you. I'm not complaining
8 about you. You're doing a great job, but I just want
9 to know why DHS and Thrive, whatever the issues are
10 with the unsheltered's, these three unsheltered
11 veterans, why doesn't DVS have that information? No
12 one from DVS received that information from these
13 agencies and when is question, when I questioned like
14 what is going on with these three unsheltered people
15 and no one knows, it's problematic.

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think that, just
17 to step it back, you know, we talked about 1000
18 veterans who have been housed through the agency and
19 so we--

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. We could do
21 with the thousand, but--

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I just want to put
23 a perspective. There have been 3800 total veterans
24 who have gone through the shelter system since 2016.
25 So, we touched a good number of vets, but we don't

2 touch all veterans who go through this system. So,
3 when we have situations where that veteran is been
4 engaged by another group, or the VA directly or be at
5 the Department of Homeless Services or another
6 entity, you know, we just have to tie in with them to
7 get into file. So, this isn't-- What is happening
8 right now is not a foreign thing and I want to get
9 these answers for you. I just want to be clear that,
10 you know, we do a lot with the veterans who have
11 housing needs, but we are not, as an agency, touching
12 every single veteran who goes through the shelter
13 system. Does that make sense?

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. No. That
15 makes sense, but when you have three people who are
16 unsheltered, then that doesn't make sense because
17 there are three people living on the streets, right?
18 When they are living on the streets, we need to pay
19 more closer attention to those living in the streets.
20 And that doesn't make sense. Whoever is in shelter
21 and has shelter over there has a roof over their
22 head. Whoever is in permanent housing, whoever is in
23 supportive housing has a roof over their head. But
24 when you have three people who are out on the
25 streets, then that is problematic when information is

2 not given over to DVS of who they are and what the
3 issues are. So, this way, you could have your care
4 coordinators do outreach and figure out, you know,
5 what more needs to be done. Like we always say there
6 is always more that needs to be done, but we should
7 have already exhausted all our options and, you know,
8 I would personally go out there, if I could get that
9 information, and to see what more needs to be done,
10 but if we don't get the information from the
11 agencies, then our hands are tied. Right? And that
12 is what disturbs me. It's like, why can't we get
13 information even on real time? You know, they should
14 have this information on their fingertips if they
15 know there are three veterans who are unsheltered.
16 They should already have their names since 2020.
17 They should have all the information of how to
18 contact them and where they are or why they refuse
19 shelter. You know, we are fortunate that I have very
20 good supportive housing in the veteran community.
21 You know, gyroscope project. There are so many good
22 supportive housing and permitted housing where, you
23 know, I had the opportunity to visit every one of
24 them in the first three years as Chair of the
25 Veterans Committee and people even called their

2 wanting to get into housing in the veterans'
3 community. Unfortunately, if you are not a veteran,
4 those shelters and the shelters the city are running
5 now are very problematic because, I could say, that
6 there and safe, they don't have the resources needed.
7 But, thankfully, the veteran supportive housing does
8 have those resources. And so there are very limited
9 reasons why a veteran refuses to go into shelter
10 unless someone is a drug user and would rather be on
11 the street because you can't, you know, use drugs in
12 the shelter. So, I want to know what those reasons
13 are and that is why The rise needs to get involved in
14 this to figure out how we can help those three
15 individuals who are unsheltered and living in the
16 streets. So, I mean, I'm sure you agree with me that
17 we should get this information in real time because
18 they should have this information on their fingertips
19 and not giving me a run around and saying that we
20 cannot or, well, we will get back to you. I know
21 what we get back to you means when it comes to DHS.
22 I can wait until maybe my next lifetime to get an
23 answer from them. So, that is why I don't see a
24 reason what they can't get information in real time.
25 I just tried calling Commissioner Banks twice on his

2 cell phone. He didn't respond to me, but, you know,
3 I don't know what to say. This hearing should have
4 ended and I want to hear from the advocates, but I
5 still want to know where these three people are.
6 Like what the issues are with these three individuals
7 the-- I mean, I could stop my hearing now and get
8 into my car and rolled over to that location and see
9 what I could do and I'm sure, Commissioner, you would
10 do the same because I know you. You would do the
11 same. And you are very hands on. So, what disturbs
12 me is how these agencies don't interact and don't
13 tell DVS-- don't give DVS the information when it
14 comes to veterans. That's why we have an agency. So
15 I don't know what to say. I really don't know what
16 to say. But I would still like to get that
17 information. Maybe Cassandra-- Cassandra? And
18 Sandra is very competent. She is great. Maybe
19 Cassandra could light the fire and get that
20 information.

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And we got folks
22 working on it also right now.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: All right. I
24 appreciate it. I really appreciate it, Commissioner.

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah. And we
3 understand we come from, too. I think for as it is--

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: we--

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: You know, we trust
8 our agencies throughout the-- It's almost like a
9 military context as far as these are our peers in our
10 brothers and sisters who are left and right and we
11 trust our friends at Department of Homeless Services.
12 And so we--

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And I don't and
14 that's why I'm questioning. I don't.

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And Thrive, too, as
16 far as to-- What I'm saying is when they tell us,
17 hey, we know who these people are. We are working
18 with them. We will get a response to your question.
19 I am confident we will be able to get that. So, yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I don't trust them.
21 I don't trust Department of Homeless Services. I
22 don't trust them. You have too much trust in them,
23 but I don't trust them and I just want to get that
24 information. I just wanted to know where and if
25 these three people are taking care of. What the

2 situation is, what the reason is why they refused to
3 go into shelter and that is it. That is all I want
4 to know. So, I'm not asking for a name. I am not
5 asking for their age. I'm not asking for any more
6 information. All I want to know is if they are in
7 contact with these three unsheltered veterans and
8 what are the reasons that they are still out in the
9 street and they refused shelter. It is a very easy--
10 And that is it. There is no private information
11 there. This is important for hearing, so the public
12 can know of what work DHS is doing with our veteran
13 community. I think it is only fair.

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I understand, Mr.
15 Chair. Yep.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I could try calling
17 Commissioner Banks again. Can you try Banks? Yeah.
18 I'm going to try him again. how are the vaccines
19 going with veterans, Commissioner? The vaccines.
20 Oh. You are muted.

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm sorry. Let me
22 take this. This is DHS. Let me take this.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh. Okay. Great.
24 Okay.

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Mr. Chair, I'm
3 sorry. I guess we were both on mute. I couldn't
4 hear that last thing you said. You were on mute.
5 And they are looking at this right now. They just
6 said they would call me back. They just called to
7 touch base, but yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, Commissioner,
9 can I go to public testimony and then we will come
10 back to this once we have the information?

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Not a problem.
12 Thanks so much, Mr. Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Great.
14 Thank you so much. I want to thank you. Thank you.

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: No. Thank you.

16 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. We have
17 now concluded administration testimony and will now
18 turn to public testimony. I would like to remind
19 everyone that we will be calling on individuals one
20 by one to testify and each panelist will be given to
21 minutes to speak. For panelists, after I call your
22 name, a member of our staff will unmute you. There
23 may be a few seconds of delay before you are on muted
24 and we thank you in advance for your patience.
25 Please wait a brief moment for the sergeant-at-arms

2 to announce that you may begin before starting your
3 testimony. For Council members who have a question
4 for a particular panelist, please use the raise hand
5 function in Zoom. I will call on you after the panel
6 has completed their testimony in the order in which
7 you raise your hand. The first panel will be Coco
8 Culhane, Isabel Muhlbauer, and Kathy Kramer. I will
9 now call on Coco Culhane to testify.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

11 COCO CULHANE: Hi. I'm Coco Culhane.

12 I am the executive director of VAP, the Veteran
13 Advocacy Project. And I just wanted to comment on
14 the three unsheltered vets if I may quickly. You
15 now, I think, likely, hopefully those three
16 individuals from a year ago have been sheltered by
17 now, but I think we should all just take a step back
18 and realize that three is said absurd number. I can
19 name-- I mean, I won't because of confidentiality,
20 but I can name three of my clients who are
21 unsheltered right now, right? And it is for any
22 number of reasons including, you know, being afraid
23 of the shelter system and not wanting to be sort of,
24 you know, cattle herded through it. So, I just
25 wanted to say that because every year when we have

2 these numbers, I find it disturbing because I think
3 we all know, as the Commissioner said, just so many
4 vets that don't even identify and they are street
5 homeless, as well.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I agree with you,
7 Coco. I agree with you. I questioned the nonveteran
8 homelessness. I questioned the Deputy Mayor last
9 week and I asked them to give me the reasons why they
10 refuse shelter and he didn't want to give me any
11 reason. He refused to give me any reason. So, you
12 know, we need to first identify what the reasons are
13 that street homeless, why they don't want to go into
14 shelter and then we have to work on these shelters to
15 make sure that they are sufficient for those people.
16 But I know that, in the veteran community, we have
17 very good supportive housing, right? It's not like--
18 you know, we have more resources, and no way. So,
19 that is what bothers me is when you have a veteran
20 out there. I want to know what the reasons are
21 because a lot of those reasons-- I can't think of a
22 reason because we have, like I mentioned, Jericho
23 project. It looks like a five star hotel and
24 veterans call my office because they want to get into
25 some of these veterans supportive housing projects.

2 So, that is why it simple for me to know what the
3 reasons are. But, if they don't have the answer of
4 why they don't want to go into shelter, then that is
5 problematic because otherwise, how are we going to
6 shelter those individuals? So, you're right. When
7 you look at the nonveteran, you know, I could tell
8 you six or seven reasons why that individual doesn't
9 want to go into shelter, right? Because it's unsafe.
10 I could go on and on, but in the veteran community,
11 it's a little different. So, that's why we only have
12 three who are unsheltered and there are a lot of
13 resources that we have. Federal resources, city
14 resources, and that is why it is important for us to
15 know what those reasons are. I appreciate it, Coco.
16 Yeah.

17 COCO CULHANE: No. Absolutely. I just
18 wanted also touch on some of the issues that we are
19 seeing with the pandemic. You know, usually I'm
20 always beating the drum for less than honorable
21 discharge veterans because they can't access the VA
22 and all of this resources, but now what we are seeing
23 is that all veterans can't access. You know, the VA
24 backlog has more than tripled in the last year. You
25 know, with 12 months of regional offices being

2 closed, there is just going to be massive due process
3 violations and those due process violations are
4 dollars, healthcare, housing subsidies. You know,
5 all of those safety nets that New York veterans need
6 more than ever with the pandemic. In particular
7 because we are seeing the systemic issues like
8 systemic racism, economic injustice. You know, that
9 is that do get compounded in the military and then,
10 when you, out, you know, leading to less than
11 honorable discharges and more criminal justice
12 involvement and things like that, mental health. We
13 are just seeing that sort of triple compounded now
14 from the military to the civilian transition now
15 the pandemic really hitting those communities harder
16 than any other New Yorkers. Thank you for the
17 funding that, you know, Chair and the committee
18 members have secured. It didn't go unnoticed that it
19 was higher. It was increased in a time when there is
20 a budget crisis. And so, just want to thank you and
21 hope that we can continue that support. And I think
22 10 years ago New York City was not a military town
23 and veterans really only had other veterans to rely
24 on and now I think we really Harlem model for the
25 nation in terms of collaboration between governments,

2 different levels of government, different agencies
3 and the innovative programs that you are funding and
4 I just think right now we really-- it is crucial to
5 not cut back on that funding with this sort of
6 looming crisis in terms of VA benefits, in terms of
7 housing. You know, all of the different things.
8 And, finally, one other thing I wanted to touch on is
9 the digital divide. I lose sleep every night over
10 the clients we can't reach. You know, we have
11 clients who don't even have a smart phone and so we
12 have to do home visits. And, you know, if they don't
13 pick up the phone-- you know, we joined DVS' Vet
14 Check effort which was terrific, but we also know
15 that most of our clients won't answer phone number
16 they don't recognize. And so, their clients we have
17 not been able to reach for the entirety of the
18 pandemic. And in terms of mental health care, you
19 know, one of my clients said, well, I just couldn't
20 figure out that camera thing and, right there, you
21 know, his mental health is a casualty of the
22 pandemic. He stopped getting treatment. So, you
23 know, working to make sure that New York's veterans
24 do have--

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

2 COCO CULHANE: access to care through
3 these telehealth would be fantastic. Thank you.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
5 I will now call on Isabelle Muhlbauer.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

7 ISABELLE MUHLBAUER: Chair Deutsch,
8 Council members, and staff, opportunity to speak to
9 have the Veterans Committee about the fiscal year 22
10 budget. My name is Isabelle Muhlbauer and I needed
11 him the senior paralegal in the veterans' practice at
12 the New York Legal Assistance Group. I am joined by
13 my colleague, Brian Foley, best supervising attorney
14 you have NYLAG's veterans practice who is also on the
15 call. That New York Legal Assistance Group uses the
16 power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat
17 economic, racial, and social injustice. Given the
18 level of needed New York City's diverse veteran
19 population, NYLAG operates to veteran specific legal
20 programs. We have a medical legal partnership with
21 the Bronx and Manhattan VA medical centers and a
22 community-based program that provides, Brad said
23 services to veterans and their families regardless of
24 their days charge status and eligibility to use a VA
25 healthcare system. I have been working with NYLAG's

2 veterans practice, our community-based team, for over
3 five years serving as a first point of contact for
4 New York City veterans seeking legal assistance. It
5 is an extremely challenging role as I frequently
6 encounter veterans in crisis who are dealing with one
7 of the most stressful and difficult many of the
8 veterans we work with struggle with severe mental
9 health issues like PTSD, TBI, and MST which can
10 complicate their legal issues and needs. Veterans
11 face all the same legal concerns as any other
12 population, but also experience issues unique to
13 their veteran status and military experiences. Our
14 veterans practice focuses on veteran specific legal
15 initiatives loss/previously utilizing the expertise
16 of NYLAG's 300+ attorneys, paralegals, and financial
17 counselors to comprehensively address any other legal
18 needs. Over the past year, which has been especially
19 devastating for the vulnerable veteran community we
20 serve, this ability to maximize resources on behalf
21 of New York City veterans has never been more
22 important. NYLAG is extremely grateful to the city of
23 New York for its investment in legal services for
24 veterans over the past several years. NYLAG has been
25 the recipient to funding through the legal services

2 for veterans initiative since its inception and,
3 because of that funding, we have been able to assist
4 veterans with thousands of cases in the area of
5 veterans benefits, public benefits, housing, consumer
6 protection, and advanced planning, among other legal
7 needs. NYLAG was awarded and is anticipating funding
8 from the New York City Department of Veteran Services
9 to assist veterans who require discharge upgrades due
10 to receiving less than honorable discharges for
11 issues related to their sexual orientation, sexual
12 trauma, or traumatic injury. This new grant is vital
13 for veterans who cannot access benefits due to their
14 less than honorable discharges, benefits that could
15 provide stabilizing income for veterans facing
16 hardship due to the pandemic. Still, services for
17 veterans have not been spared from budget cuts.
18 NYLAG's legal services for veterans funding was
19 significantly decreased by 32% in the fiscal year 21
20 budget which has impacted the number of veterans we
21 can serve, despite the myriad of new obstacles faced
22 by the veteran community because of Covid 19. Every
23 day brings us closer to what we hope will be the end
24 of this devastating pandemic.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

2 ISABELLE MUHLBAUER: May I have another
3 minute? Every day brings us closer to what we hope
4 will be the end of this devastating pandemic, one
5 that has claimed the lives of over 10,000 veterans.
6 Even as we see positive developments in the fight
7 against Covid 19, we must prepare for the new needs
8 and challenges sure to follow the end of current
9 federal and state Covid related protections,
10 particularly VA debt relief and New York's eviction
11 moratorium. It is essential that the city Council
12 and the administration continue and expand the
13 funding that allows NYLAG and other civil legal
14 service providers to help New York City veterans face
15 both the current and impending challenges. Thank you
16 for the opportunity to testify today. We look
17 forward to engaging in further discussions about
18 surveying our veteran communities and improving their
19 access to critical legal services another resources.
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Isabel.
22 NYLAG does amazing work and thank you, Ryan.

23 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
24 We will now call on Cathy Cramer.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

2 CATHY CRAMER: Ampry-Samuels, Vallone,
3 and Maisel. My name is Cathy Cramer and I am the CEO
4 of Legal Information for Families Today , usually
5 called LIFT, and I am here to speak to you about
6 LIFT's work with veterans and active military service
7 members in New York City. With our team of lawyers,
8 LIFT it is one of the few organizations in New York
9 City that works directly with litigants who come to
10 the Family Court each year, there are over 250,000
11 filings in New York City Family Court and, in most
12 cases, the litigant does not qualify for a free court
13 appointed lawyer and many cannot afford to hire a
14 lawyer themselves. 80% of litigants who come to
15 Family Court proceed without a lawyer and they are
16 coming on issues fundamental to the well-being of
17 their children such as child support, custody,
18 visitation, and protection in domestic violence
19 cases. With the support of Chairman Deutsch and the
20 rest of the New York City Council, lift has expanded
21 outreach and service to veterans over the past two
22 years. Veterans often face a number of family
23 challenges due to their service and then their
24 ultimate return to civilian life. Child support
25 responsibilities do not stop when someone is in

2 active duty and many veterans look to modify these
3 orders before they leave. It is important that they
4 are aware of these laws so that they can protect
5 their legal rights with regard to their family while
6 deployed and once they come home. LIFT offers free
7 legal advice and guidance to them. During the
8 pandemic, the time when the Family Court services
9 have been greatly limited, LIFT's 100% remote
10 operations have provided essential information and
11 updates on family law. There is a huge demand for
12 our services right now. Our help line has received
13 twice the daily number of calls for assistance and
14 our lawyers are doing twice as many legal
15 consultations as in 2019. But the Family Court is
16 only working on a limited basis. No new child
17 support cases have been heard in the last 12 months,
18 even though thousands of New Yorkers have lost their
19 jobs. There have been no opportunities to modify
20 child support during this time and arrears are
21 accruing. The court is now working on pending cases
22 that were filed before March 2020. The backlog of
23 child support cases will take years and this is a
24 huge problem for all of our clients, especially
25 veterans. And, in addition, many of our clients do

2 not have access to the technology to participate in
3 Family Court. The digital divide is hurting people
4 who are struggling with so many challenges. During
5 the past year, we have participated with the veteran
6 working groups and collaborated with these partners
7 remotely. We have worked with about 85 veterans
8 during the past two years of this new program. We
9 have done Know Your Rights presentations and legal
10 clinics out in the communities remotely. We have
11 written to legal resource guides for both veterans
12 and active military parents. These take the
13 complicated legal laws and put them in plain language
14 and they are translated in and we distribute them
15 throughout the city. We have one attorney that now
16 specializes in veterans family law. We are actively
17 working with Fordham School of Law ferric center to
18 develop a presentation on Know Your Rights that their
19 volunteers can give to veterans at city universities.
20 We have joined Unite New York City as provider as
21 well as working with NYLAG, the city bar, just, and
22 other groups. Our work in this area is mainly union
23 child support, but we work with veterans on a number
24 of issues. For example, we give a voice to the
25 fathers who often feel they have been wrongly painted

2 as deadbeat dads such as the veteran who had never
3 missed a child support payment, but felt he was not
4 or heard by the court. We have another veteran who
5 was about to be deployed into active duty and though
6 he shared legal and physical custody with the mom,
7 she threatened to withhold visitation when he was on
8 the and move the child out of state. We've
9 connected veterans to resources to help them find
10 employment and reduce their child support payments
11 through state programs. We have guided a mother who
12 has a travel assignment to challenge a child support
13 order against her when she missed a hearing that she
14 never received notice of. We've assisted a veteran
15 who owes 350,000 dollars in arrears in three separate
16 child support orders combined. He had been driving
17 busses and working for Uber because he could not walk
18 well due to an injury. But the child support office
19 suspended his license for nonpayment of child
20 support, so now he is unemployed. And we've recently
21 advised a veteran who had service related mental
22 health issues on how to get visitation with his child
23 that he had not seen for months. The mother has an
24 order of protection against him--

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

2 CATHY CRAMER: and without provision
3 regarding visitation, she basically was keeping him
4 from seeing his child? Can I take one more minute?
5 So, all of us at LIFT are profoundly grateful to the
6 city Council for your ongoing support of LIFT's new
7 programming. Without your core funding, we would be
8 unable to serve the 25,000 New York families in
9 crisis every year. We hope that the Council will
10 continue your support of our citywide initiative and
11 we ask this committee to continue your support of the
12 60,000 dollars that you've given us and that has been
13 guided through the committee through the Chairman.
14 Although the Family Court is experiencing a difficult
15 period, LIFT is part of the solution for both the
16 litigants and the court. Thank you, again, for
17 considering our testimony and for ensuring LIFT's
18 future work with veterans. Without you, we could not
19 continue with important work.

20 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
21 That concludes this panel. I will now turn it over
22 to Chair Deutsch for any questions.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. No questions.
24 I just want to tell the first panel that you all do
25 amazing work and we're very familiar with all the

2 work you do on behalf of the veterans and just thank
3 you. Thank you to-- thank you, Cathy, for your
4 testimony.

5 CATHY CRAMER: Thank you.

6 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. I will now
7 turn to the second panel. The second panel will be
8 Allison Messina, Joe Viti, Peter Kempner, and Ashton
9 Stuart. I will now call on Allison Messina.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

11 ALLISON MESSINA: Good afternoon, Chair
12 Deutsch, and fellow city Council members. Thank you
13 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is
14 Allison Messina. I am the vice president of
15 workforce development at Project Renewal, the New
16 York City homeless services organization. For more
17 than 53 years, Project Or do all how disempowered
18 individuals who are experiencing homelessness to
19 renew their lives. Each year, Project Renewal serves
20 nearly 15,000 New Yorkers, including hundreds of
21 veterans through our wraparound services that focus
22 on health, homes, and jobs. We are grateful to
23 Speaker Johnson, Chair Deutsch, and the city Council
24 for their generous support of Project Renewals
25 homeless prevention services for veterans. Today, I

2 would like to give you an overview of how Project
3 Renewal staff have worked to meet the needs of
4 veterans during this pandemic wall demand for our
5 services has increased. In fiscal year 20, we
6 provided healthcare, including primary care and
7 mental health services to 168 veterans through our
8 four clinics located within our shelter sites, as
9 well as through our three mobile healthcare vans.
10 Despite the challenges in delivering care during the
11 pandemic, we have kept pace with our service delivery
12 this year. Among our housing programs, we welcomed
13 37 veterans into emergency shelters and 62 veterans
14 into supportive housing. And so far in this fiscal
15 year, we have ensured 63 veterans are safely housed
16 within Project Renewal and they are benefiting from
17 our enhanced services which include telepsychiatry.
18 Our employment services also continue to be critical
19 in helping veterans get back on their feet. So far
20 this year, 20 veterans have enrolled in Project
21 Renewal employment services. We expect this number
22 to climb now that our programs are fully operational.
23 These are job training programs with proven track
24 records. Our sector-based training programs have
25 placed 83% of our graduates into jobs over the last

2 five years. Before I conclude, I want to tell you
3 about Richard, a veteran who lives in Brooklyn.
4 Richard served our country for over a decade in the
5 Marine Corps and the Army National Guard. After his
6 service, Richard had trouble adjusting to civilian
7 life and ended up unemployed. In 2018, he enrolled
8 in our culinary arts training program and, upon
9 graduating, we hired him as a chef at City Be
10 kitchens which is our social purpose enterprise, a
11 catering company which also prepares meals for
12 shelters across New York City. Today, Richard is a
13 vital member of our team. He helps to prepare 7500
14 meals a day for New Yorkers in need. Richard's
15 renewal would not have been possible without the
16 generosity of the New York City Council. Your
17 support has been essential for ongoing staff training
18 and better meeting the unique needs of veterans and
19 helping us reach our goal of becoming a preferred
20 veteran service provider citywide. It has also
21 facilitated our partnerships with the VA hospital
22 system and collaboration with other organizations
23 that serve veterans. We are proud to serve those who
24 bravely served our country and sincerely appreciate--

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

2 ALLISON MESSINA: the Council's
3 consideration of increased support so we may build
4 upon these efforts at a time when our veterans need
5 us most. Thank you so much for this opportunity to
6 testify today.

7 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
8 We will now hear from Joe Vitti.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

10 JOE VITTI: Thank you. Good afternoon,
11 Chair Deutsch and members of the New York City
12 Council Committee on Veterans. My name is Joe Vitti
13 and I'm the director of the Hospice Veterans programs
14 for VNSNY. I also served in the Army as battalion
15 intelligence officer for a field artillery unit in
16 the role of a platoon leader and a fire intelligence
17 officer. I want to take this opportunity to thank
18 you and to testify about VNSNY hospice veterans
19 program for which we are requesting \$150,000 in
20 Council funding. VNSNY is the largest freestanding
21 not-for-profit home and community-based healthcare
22 organization in the US providing care to over 44,000
23 patients. VNSNY has cared for vulnerable populations
24 continuously and been there for New York throughout
25 many of its biggest public health and natural

2 emergencies including Covid 19 in March of last year
3 where we cared for more than 5000 Covid positive
4 patients in their homes. VNSNY Hospice is the
5 largest hospice provider to veterans in the state.
6 In 2020, we conducted 920 veteran patient admissions
7 to our hospice service. Our hospice program is a
8 level five We Honor Veterans program with the
9 National Hospice and Palliative Care, a national
10 program in the VA which empowers hospice providers to
11 meet the unique demands of dying veterans on end of
12 life care. There are approximately 22 and a half
13 million veterans in America today, 18 million of
14 which are over the age of 65. It is becoming even
15 more important to conduct this outreach so that they,
16 the veterans, know their full VA benefits which many
17 of them are unaware of that can cover critical
18 homecare and hospice and long term care services. I
19 want to thank you, the City Council, especially the
20 Committee on Veterans, for providing the first time
21 funding to this important program in fiscal year
22 2021. With the support, we have expanded into
23 Brooklyn and other areas with our veteran liaison,
24 Mrs. Sung Yoon, who is a former female Army Combat
25 Medic, to help engage and support the community based

2 organizations and community hospitals. Our diverse
3 team brings years of experience from VA Hospital
4 sites and active duty sites, including Walter Reed
5 Hospital with backgrounds in military service,
6 ethnicity, and gender which helps bring culturally
7 competent care. This additional funding will help
8 support staff resources with, one, educate and
9 improve New York City veterans access to their VA
10 benefits. Two, expand partnerships with veterans
11 hospitals and groups. And, three, educate community-
12 based organizations and providers including veterans
13 service organizations about veterans special needs
14 and end-of-life. During Covid 19, DVS and the
15 Visiting Nurses Service of New York helps support a
16 hospice patient who was in need of food who had
17 limited resources due to the impact of the pandemic
18 where we collaborated to help get Meals on Wheels
19 services. We believe that this collaboration--

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

21 JOE VITTI: can help in many ways use and
22 we look forward to your support and continued
23 relationship in the years to come. Thank you so
24 much.

25

2 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
3 We will now hear from Peter Kempner.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins upon your
5 unmuting.

6 PETER KEMPNER: Good afternoon. My name
7 is Peter Kempner and I am the legal director at
8 Volunteers of Legal Service, also known as VOLS. At
9 VOLS, one of the things that I oversee is our
10 veterans initiative. Before the pandemic, our
11 veterans initiative is worked hand-in-hand with the
12 VA hospital in Manhattan where we ran a legal clinic
13 focused on the end-of-life needs of senior veterans.
14 We worked closely with the social work department and
15 the palliative care given. After the pandemic shut
16 the VA hospital down to outside visitors, we shifted
17 our services online and the core work that we need to
18 ways that we help senior veterans engage in end-of-
19 life planning and planning for incapacity by
20 providing them with last wills and testaments, powers
21 of attorney, healthcare proxies, and other advanced
22 directives. As we look ahead to the needs of New
23 York City's veterans over the upcoming fiscal year,
24 there are many lessons to be learned from the
25 pandemic here we are emerging from and we must

2 acknowledge the enormous challenges that face our
3 cities veterans and, as a legal services provider, we
4 focus on the needs that an attorney can make a
5 difference in our city's veterans for. And so, I
6 want to draw attention to three issues. One is the
7 pending eviction crisis that so many New Yorkers
8 face. The other is the need to ensure that veterans
9 have access to benefits to which they are entitled
10 and the third is to make sure that all vulnerable
11 veterans have the right player in place in the event
12 that they ever become incapacitated or pass away. In
13 January 2021, the United States Department of
14 Veterans Affairs reported that more veterans had died
15 from Covid 19 than from the operations in Operation
16 Iraqi Freedom and Operation And during Freedom
17 combined. And so, we know that so many veterans have
18 been vulnerable over the past year to the Covid 19
19 pandemic. And for our clients, by engaging in
20 effective life planning, the elderly and disabled
21 veterans are much more likely to be able to stay in
22 their homes, age in place, and live with dignity. A
23 veteran who has executed a power of attorney empowers
24 their caregivers to be able to seek government
25 benefits to pay their rents, to sign leases, to apply

2 for and recertify for housing subsidies, and to deal
3 with any issues which may arise with their landlord
4 or housing provider. Landlord that market forces are
5 increasingly pushing long term tenants from their
6 homes, so, it's taking action to stabilize housing
7 for veterans is more urgent than ever. A study
8 released just last week by the US Department of
9 Housing and Urban Development showed that, for the
10 first time in a decade, veteran homelessness in the
11 United States has increased and that was actually
12 done-- that survey had been done before the outbreak
13 of the Covid 19 crisis.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

15 PETER KEMPNER: And we know that so many
16 veterans have been vulnerable to Covid 19 and their
17 housing has been put at risk. And so, you know, what
18 I would like to do is just applaud the city Council
19 for funding free legal services for our veteran
20 community and urge the Council to take the necessary
21 steps to safeguard and even increase this funding in
22 the upcoming fiscal year. Having access to free
23 high-quality veteran focus legal services will ensure
24 a brighter and safer future for our cities veterans

2 who have sacrificed so much for all of us. Thank you
3 for your time and allowing me to testify.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
5 We will now hear from Ashton Stewart.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

7 ASHTON STEWART: Hi, Chair Deutsch and
8 members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is
9 Ashton Stewart. I'm the manager of Sage Vets. Sage
10 is a statewide program for LGBT, or lesbian, gay,
11 bisexual, and transgender veterans. Support from the
12 New York City Council has been crucial to our
13 program, allowing us to engage with older LGBT
14 veterans across the great city of New York and make a
15 real difference in the lives of many. Sage was
16 founded in 1978 and is the country's first and
17 largest organization dedicated to improving lives of
18 LGBT older people and Sage Vets is one of many
19 programs at Sage, but the only program in New York
20 State that is dedicated to older LGBT veterans. This
21 program was created in 2014 to identify support and
22 improve access and care to older LGBT veterans across
23 the state and in the city. And over the last year,
24 we had a lot of success and we have been able to
25 continue the program working remotely. We made over

2 40 legal referrals with nine legal victories
3 including a discharge upgrade, approve disability
4 claims, restoration of honor act was approved,
5 preventing an eviction, and a ruling by the New York
6 State Supreme Court to change guardianship. And this
7 is all thanks to the legal programs that do exist to
8 the pro bono veteran legal program that we partner up
9 with and work as a mediator between the veteran in
10 these programs is crucial to this ongoing work. Last
11 year, also, we were heard on marketplace, national
12 broadcast heard by more than 20 million listeners
13 each week and we were also very honored to receive
14 the 2020 black veterans for social justice gallantry
15 award and we also nominated the very first
16 transgender veterans to the New York State Senate
17 veterans Hall of Fame, Brad Hoylman's district. She
18 was inducted last May. And in the Restoration of
19 Honor Act, the application that was successful was
20 for a 63 year old black cisgender gay male of the US
21 Navy who had perfect performance evaluations, scored
22 the highest possible score. He earned Sailor of the
23 Month multiple times and was discharges for being
24 gay. He was awarded the Restoration of Honor Act.
25 He had a meritorious application thanks to the work

2 the that legal partners worked with us on. and his
3 statement is he had enormous admiration for the Navy,
4 but not the policy that ended his career. We are so
5 delighted to have three more veterans in the pipeline
6 to apply for the Restoration of Honor who are in
7 similar situations. We are able to participate in a
8 virtual Veterans Day Parade. The city is got such
9 determination, Mr. Deutsch, to continue our work and
10 to continue to get the word out there about the great
11 success that we have had about the city Council. We
12 want to continue this work, obviously. We know that
13 things are tight and we appreciate the support that
14 we have had. Just a close, we have had great success
15 on a case for a Latina transgender female veteran who
16 lives in the Bronx. She submitted an MST claim. Was
17 awarded back pay amounting to more than \$20,000 and
18 has been increased to 70% service-connected
19 disability in her life is changed. She also has that
20 courage--

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

22 ASHTON STEWART: that is validated now
23 because the VA admitted that, yeah, something that
24 happened here to you was wrong and we want to
25 compensate you for that. So, thank you so much for

2 making such a tremendous difference in people's
3 lives.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
5 That concludes this panel. I will turn it back over
6 to Chair Deutsch for any remarks or questions.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Ashton.
8 It's really a pleasure to partner with you on these
9 initiatives. And also I want to thank Peter and Joe
10 for their testimony. Thank you very much.

11 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. We will
12 now turn to our final panel which will be Charlotte
13 Martin and Gary Bagley. We will now call on
14 Charlotte Martin.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

16 CHARLOTTE MARTIN: Hello. First off,
17 thank you to the City Council-- Sorry. First off,
18 good afternoon and thank you for holding today's
19 hearing and advocating for veterans funding. My name
20 is Charlotte Martin and I am the senior manager of
21 access initiatives at the Intrepid Sea, Air, and
22 Space Museum. In this capacity, I have the privilege
23 of overseeing the museum's veterans access initiative
24 that includes a range of programs and resources for
25 current and former service members and their

2 families. I do want to take a moment to acknowledge
3 the generous financial and advisory support of the
4 City Council Committee on Veterans. I want to thank
5 Chair Deutsch and the committee members and staff for
6 your ongoing effort to connect veterans with one
7 another and with cultural resources like the Intrepid
8 Museum. At the Intrepid Museum, our mission is to
9 promote the awareness and understanding of history,
10 science and service in order to honor our heroes,
11 educate the public, and inspire our youth. Centered
12 on a former Navy Aircraft Carrier, we have long
13 engaged veterans through Veterans Day and Memorial
14 Day events, Fleet Week activities, a robust volunteer
15 program, and free admission for veterans. In the
16 fall of 2014, we also launched free military family
17 programs to connect-- to foster connections and
18 started offering free tours to PTS peer support group
19 at the Bronx VA and we now offer free tours to any
20 veterans organization. We soon expanded to offering
21 Intrepid After Hours, an evening program exclusively
22 for current and former service members with behind
23 the scenes opportunities, veteran lead creative
24 workshops, catered dinner, and plenty of bonding
25 across branches, service areas, and post service

2 experiences. Thank to City Council funding, we are
3 able to schedule these programs more regularly,
4 guarantee high quality catering for the all important
5 bonding over meals, and bring in veteran artist
6 performers and others. With funding, we also began
7 to offer special veteran plus programs, including
8 film screenings, performances, a pride event, special
9 partnerships, and now a book club with books provided
10 for veterans and their loved ones, as well as vet
11 video chats. We have benefitted from staff trainings
12 lead by experts at the NYU Langone Cohen Military
13 Family Center and the New York Presbyterian Military
14 Family Wellness Center and, from the advice and
15 feedback of our standing Council Veteran Advisors and
16 other recipients of city funding, including DVS, Sage
17 Vets, Jericho Project, and others have been crucial
18 partners and advocates for their constituents. When
19 the museum closed due to the pandemic just over a
20 year ago, we quickly pivoted to the online
21 programming in order to maintain for and connection
22 with veterans. We collaborated with Water Well, a
23 new Memorial Day programming, and converted are
24 planned Intrepid After hours to resume program.
25 Recognizing the whole of isolation, we have since

2 continued our online programming, maintaining
3 connection with veterans through a difficult time,
4 including with our Intrepid book club and a monthly
5 on liberty zooming into museums across the country
6 program to create some semblance of travel and
7 meeting new people. Our: all of this work is to
8 foster community and connection among veterans,
9 including those who are not connected or may feel
10 excluded from other veteran spaces.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

12 CHARLOTTE MARTIN: The veteran community
13 development initiative has been crucial to the growth
14 and impact of the Intrepid Museums programs for
15 veterans and their loved ones and we respectfully ask
16 that the committee advocate for the continuation of
17 the funds for this initiative, especially as we look
18 ahead to reopening in just a couple of days and to
19 gradually returning to in person programming. So,
20 thank you very much.

21 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
22 We will now call on our final witness. As a
23 reminder, if we have inadvertently missed anyone that
24 has registered to testify today and have yet to have
25 been called, please use the zoom raise hand function

2 now and you will be called in the order your hand has
3 been raised. We will now hear from Gary Bagley.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time begins.

5 MODERATOR: Oh, Gary, I think you are
6 still on mute.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You have to accept the
8 unmute.

9 GARY BAGLEY: There we go.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: There you go. Time
11 begins.

12 GARY BAGLEY: Great. Thank you for the
13 opportunity to testify today, Chair Deutsch and
14 members of the city Council Committee on Veterans. I
15 am Gary Bagley from New York Cares mission Vet Check
16 has been an incredibly important and wonderful
17 collaboration between the New York City Department of
18 Veteran Services, the Mayor's Office of Thrive NYC,
19 and New York Cares. Our volunteers are being put to
20 effective use providing veterans with information
21 about how to access vital public services including
22 free meals, Covid 19 testing site locations, and
23 mental health resources. Our specially trained
24 volunteers call New York City veterans. They provide
25 screening for essential services such as groceries or

2 medication and, as important, provide a warm and
3 caring voice. The program follows a script. The
4 phone systems live tracking software allows
5 volunteers to report any discovered needs in real
6 time for fulfillment. In other words, if a volunteer
7 connects with the client in crisis, the volunteer can
8 connect the veteran in real time to a crisis
9 management social worker. The program operates by a
10 secure phone system which allows fully background
11 checked volunteers and clients to connect without
12 sharing personal contact information. Since June
13 2020, New York Cares has made over 28,000 calls to
14 clients through the work of 468 trained volunteers.
15 Continuing to fund this type of programming enables
16 many New York City veterans to benefit from a
17 connection to their fellow New Yorkers. Thank you
18 for allowing me to testify today.

19 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony.
20 As one final reminder, if we have missed anyone that
21 has registered to testify and has not been called on,
22 please use the zoom raise hand function now. Seeing
23 no hands, I will turn it back over to Chair Deutsch
24 for closing remarks.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you very
3 much. So, firstly, I want to thank Charlotte and the
4 guy for testifying. And to Charlotte, we had a
5 beautiful and meaningful event at the Intrepid on
6 Veterans Day. It was really a meaningful event.
7 Unfortunately, due to Covid, we could only have a
8 certain amount of people there. But I just want to
9 say-- I want to thank my colleagues and I want to
10 thank Speaker Corey Johnson and my colleagues for
11 always standing up and making sure that the veterans
12 initiatives, that we give to the community-based
13 organizations who do outstanding and amazing work.
14 Last year we went through tough times and we're able
15 to get that funding after pushing and during budget
16 negotiations. This year we have the same situation
17 as last year. We will do everything possible to make
18 sure because this is crucial for the veterans
19 community and we need to keep on doing more, not
20 less. So, I'm confident with the support of my
21 colleagues that we're able to make sure that this
22 funding is, you know, reinstated. So, I think I'm
23 done unless Commissioner Hendon is still on zoom.
24 I'm not sure. Did he raise his hand? Commissioner?

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Hey. I'm still on.
3 Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. No. So, no. Folks
4 from DHS got back to us and what we're being told is
5 that social services law 131 prevents us from
6 disclosing, you know, information of this nature in a
7 public hearing. And so this is why we wanted to make
8 sure we can get back to you with what we can get on
9 this. And another point, too, is that this was a
10 count that was January 28th, 2020. And so what we
11 believe, from talking internally, because the street
12 homeless team for DHS, they make sure that those
13 folks that have been identified receive the same kind
14 of services they were to receive were they in the
15 shelter. And so what we believe is it's likely these
16 folks have been housed since then because that is 14
17 months ago. So one of the questions we want to get
18 back to you about is what support were those people
19 offered and where are they right now? And so these
20 are things we do. We recognize the importance so it
21 can, you know, get at the bottom of your questions.
22 But right now, unfortunately, can't release that
23 information at this time. Know that we're working
24 this and we want to be able to get you responses.
25 But, you know, I've been told by DHS that, yeah,

2 social services 131 prevents us from disclosing this
3 type of client information in a public hearing,
4 unfortunately.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. All right.

6 So, please [inaudible 02:27:17] lit the fire under
7 DHS, right? Okay. So we'll follow up offline.

8 Okay. So, I want to thank you, Commissioner. I want
9 to thank you for all the great work that you do and I
10 want to thank you, staff. Your wonderful staff. And
11 I want thank the Veterans Committee and my citywide
12 coordinator, Joe Bello, and to all of those out
13 there, all the advocates. Thank you so much for all
14 the work and, speaking on the behalf of the
15 Commissioner, also, thank you for all the work that
16 you do and what-- So, looking forward to the budgets
17 and getting the veterans initiatives reinstated with
18 the help of my colleagues. So, to everyone out
19 there, God bless the United States of America. God
20 bless all our veterans and God bless you all. The
21 hearing is now adjourned. Thank you.

22

23

24

25

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 _____ April 14, 2021 _____