



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

**New York City Council Committee on Veterans
September 17, 2019, 10am**

Good morning, Chair Deutsch and members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Adam Connolly and I am proud to serve as Assistant Commissioner for Engagement & Community Services at the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). I am joined today by Alexis Wichowski, Associate Commissioner for Public Affairs at DVS.

On behalf of Commissioner Loree Sutton and DVS, we would like to extend our appreciation to the Committee on Veterans for their advocacy and leadership in the veterans' community in New York City. DVS's Engagement & Community Services members have been proud to greet members of the City Council, including Chair Deutsch, at our Veteran Resource Centers throughout the city, and hope they will have additional opportunities to introduce members of the Council to our local veterans at the Veteran Resource Centers and other events in the future.

About VetConnectNYC

I would now like to address the subject of this hearing, the coordinated care network, VetConnectNYC. VetConnectNYC is a one-stop shop for New York City service members, veterans, and their families to connect to a range of free, vetted, quality services, and only those services for which they are deemed eligible. It's what we in the military community like to call a "force multiplier:" With a single phone call or by filling out a brief intake form, VetConnectNYC links service members, veterans, and their families to a network of over 100 service providers capable of addressing the range of life needs.

VetConnectNYC is a partnership with the City of New York, who procured the network, and Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), who coordinates the subcontractors, of which there are two: Unite Us, a veteran-owned tech company who operates the digital platform, and Northwell Health, who serve as the coordination center, providing trained veteran peer specialists who work one on one with constituents.

How it works

In a moment, we will present a live demonstration of how a person could submit an assistance request to VetConnectNYC. I'll also provide a brief summary of the process, discuss how VetConnectNYC has performed since we launched in November 2018, and provide some key metrics that reveal insights about the complexity of needs New York City service members, veterans, and their families have had met through this program.

Signing up for VetConnectNYC is simple and straightforward. You can call 1.833.VETS.NYC. You can go to the website, www.vetconnectnyc.org from a computer or mobile phone. Or you can speak with one of DVS's Outreach Coordinators, who will assist you in signing up.

After filling out a few basic demographic questions, you'll receive a phone call from a coordinated care manager within 3-5 business days. For urgent mental health needs, VetConnectNYC also prominently displays the phone number for the Veterans Crisis Line.

All the care managers are also veterans, working at our coordinated care provider, Northwell Health, one of the largest healthcare providers in the Northeast. The care managers will ask questions designed to pinpoint what kinds of services you're eligible for as well as what needs you have. As the data will show, most callers have more than one need – if you're seeking housing, you may also need help finding a job and be interested in speaking with a mentor, for instance. The care manager then inputs relevant details from the conversation into an advanced technology platform operated by the veteran-owned tech business, Unite US.

This technology platform – visible only to Northwell Health and the target service providers – allows the care managers to track which service providers the caller is eligible for, make the referral electronically, track when the service provider successfully connects the caller to services, and confirm when the case is conclusively resolved. If the case is not successfully resolved with the first service provider referral, Northwell Health's care managers can then conduct follow-up calls and emails with the client until an appropriate service provider is matched with the case.

If a constituent needs a service that is not available within the vetted provider network of VetConnectNYC, Northwell Health's care managers can also make a referral to an out-of-network organization. The vetting process to become a member of the network includes consideration of several areas, such as: need for service within the network: mission, vision, and services of the provider; staff capacity and willingness to adhere to the referral model; the service providers' finance and budgeting; accreditations; references (from other providers); and a demonstrated focus on data, measurement, and commitment to improvement. In sum, the service providers within the VetConnectNYC network go through a thorough vetting process.

The main benefit of VetConnectNYC is of course what it provides for service members, veterans, and family members: it's very easy to connect to VetConnectNYC and very difficult to fall through the cracks. Once in the system, VetConnectNYC's care managers can continue to track a case until it is resolved.

In cases where a service needed is provided by a City agency, Northwell Health's care managers can refer the case to DVS. DVS's Outreach Coordinators then serve as the service provider, making the warm hand-off to a contact at the most appropriate City agency.

At this time, I will demonstrate via laptop computer how to submit an assistance request for VetConnectNYC.

(Live demonstration of VetConnectNYC)

As you can see, VetConnectNYC is easy to access, easy to navigate, and – with real people providing the coordination of care – easy to connect service members, veterans, and family members to the resources they need.

How VetConnectNYC performed

Since the launch of VetConnectNYC in November 2018 through the end of August 2019, the platform managed 916 service requests for 483 veterans and family members across 20 categories, the top three most frequently requested ones being Housing & Shelter at 23%, Employment at 19%, and Benefits Navigation at 12%. The bulk of service requests – 48% -- came in via the VetConnectNYC website. This is followed by phone calls and walk-ins at 42%, and a smaller percentage being referred directly from the network provider themselves, at 10%.

The average number of days from the veteran or family member making initial contact to the coordination care center to getting a referral to a service provider was 5 days. The average number of days from first contacting VetConnectNYC to resolution of a case was 12 days. DVS is working with our partners at IVMF and Northwell Health to ensure that we're doing everything we can to be responsive to veterans and their families in the timeliest way possible and are constantly striving to improve our processes to be more streamlined, efficient, and swift.

DVS is also committed to ensuring that the network of service providers meets the needs of our veterans and their families, and to that end is working tirelessly to expand the network. To provide context on what this means, when DVS launched VetConnectNYC in November 2018, there were 80 vetted service providers in the network. As of July 2019, this number increased to 102 service providers. Today, we are in the process of vetting or onboarding an additional 26 service providers. When the current onboarding process is completed, it will represent a 60% increase in the number of service providers in the network from launch to present.

Next steps

To ensure we're reaching the widest possible audience of New York City service members, veterans, and their families, DVS is working in close partnership with the Mayor's Office of Operations to map out a large-scale outreach campaign – using both social media posts, explainer videos, and print media, including ads in ethnic and community newspapers -- to be launched in the coming months.

DVS also invites each and every City Council member to link to VetConnectNYC on their own websites, helping to ensure that your veteran and military family member constituents are aware of and have easy access to the free services that they have earned. DVS would also welcome the opportunity to work with your communications teams to develop appropriate language that meets the specific needs of your constituencies to both understand and gain access to VetConnectNYC, and of course provide the VetConnectNYC official logo for your websites.

In conclusion, in partnership with IVMF, Northwell Health, and Unite Us, with VetConnectNYC, we've created the most comprehensive service network in New York City. Our sole purpose is helping service members, veterans, survivors, and families find the resources they need to live fulfilling and purpose-driven lives. With the planned outreach campaign, we

feel confident that we will expand our reach to thousands of additional veterans, connecting them to programs and benefits that they have earned through their service to our country.

We look forward to the continued partnership of the Council in advocating for veterans and their families in New York City. We thank you again for this opportunity to meet with you today. At this time, I would be happy to address your questions.

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VetConnectNYC (VCNYC) Live Demo

Prepared by: Assistant Commissioner Adam Connolly

For: Committee on Veterans

9/17/2019

Agenda

- VCNYC client intake form (Web)
- VCNYC client intake form (Mobile Phone)
- Unite US backend interface

CREATING CONNECTIONS ACROSS NEW YORK CITY

WHO WE ARE

If you are in crisis, please call the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

Disclaimer:
VetConnectNYC is a referral coordination platform that matches needs with solutions on a non-crisis basis. As such, VetConnectNYC receives all requests for assistance and processes them within 3-5 business days. If you are having thoughts of suicide or hurting others, or experiencing an emotional crisis, please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room for immediate assistance. You may also call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 Press 1 or text the Crisis Text Line at 838255 or call NYC Well at 646-692-6955 Press 2 or text WELL to 65173.

First name

Last name

Date of birth



VCNYC Client Intake Form (Web)

www.vetconnectnyc.org



Informed Consent for Participation and Information Sharing

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in a network made up of health and social service providers ("The Network") who work together to connect clients with services using Unite Us, a web-based platform. In order to connect you to people/agencies that can help you, we ask you to allow us to share your information with those providers.

Your information will be kept confidential and will be only used to help you get the services you want. Some providers may ask you to sign another consent or authorization to share your information and follow federal, state, and local privacy and data protection laws, including federal HIPAA laws.

Please read each statement and sign at the bottom if you agree.

I agree that:

- My information may be accessible within Unite Us by the agencies that participate in the network;
- My information may be shared in the Unite Us platform with participating agencies over the internet to help me get services;
- Services providers and/or Unite Us may contact me by phone, email, text, fax or mail to help me get the services I need and to follow up on my status with and experience with those services. I understand that the information sent to me may contain sensitive information which I may not be able to secure;
- I will not hold Unite Us or any participating agency legally responsible if I do not get services or am unhappy with the services I receive;
- I need to give accurate information about myself and I may ask to change or add to information in my file that is not correct or up to date;
- My information may be shared outside of Unite Us to help me get services and to report on the quality of services I have received;
- I may be asked to fill out a survey about my experience with Unite Us and/or an agency;
- My information (not using my name or other identifiers) may be used to improve service;
- I may be enrolled into programs funded by local, state or federal agencies and these groups may contact me for information about the services I receive;
- I may be told if this consent is changed and I may cancel my consent if I wish;
- My consent expires if I decide to withdraw it and ask that my information not be shared within Unite Us at any time;
- If I ask to withdraw my consent, it will take at least one business day for that to happen;
- If I am signing as a personal representative of another person, I am affirming that I am legally allowed to sign this release of information for that person;
- If I am under the age of 18, I understand that a parent, legal guardian, personal representative, or other legally allowed person has to sign this form for me.

AGREED AND ACKNOWLEDGED (If you are under the age to provide consent under appropriate laws, a legal guardian, personal representative or person legally authorized is required to sign this form on your behalf)

_____ Signature	_____ Printed Name	_____ Relationship (if not self)	_____ Date
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VERBAL AGREEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT WITNESSED BY:

_____ Signature	_____ Printed Name	_____ Relationship	_____ Date
_____ Title	_____ Time		

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/uniteus-io-assets/legal/20190212/unite-us-global-release-of-information-consent-form.pdf>

← → C | vetconnectnyc.org

SIGN UP NOW

If you are in crisis, please call the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

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Success!

Thank you for submitting your request. We are reviewing the request, and look forward to connecting you with the services you need.

[Download Your Signed Consent Form](#)



VCNYC Client Intake Form (Mobile)

www.vetconnectnyc.org

NYC Veterans

UNITE US Dashboard Clients Reports My Networks Sara Jones

Jane Smith CONSENT ACCEPTED VIEW/EDIT PROFILE

DOB 1/2/1984 (Age 35) | TEL 123-456-7890 | EMAIL jane.smith@email.com
 ADDRESS 99 Main Street, New York, AK 01303 | HOUSEHOLD 4 | HOUSEHOLD INCOME \$32,000
 PREFERRED METHOD OF CONTACT Message | BEST TIME TO CONTACT Afternoon

Records

SERVICE	TYPE	CREATED	ASSIGNED TO	STATUS
👕 Clothing	Referral	8/31/2017	NC Serves Metroline Coordination Center	🟢
👔 Employment	Assistance Request	8/23/2017	NC Serves Metroline Coordination Center	🟢
🍲 Food	Case	8/15/2017	NC Food Bank	🟢
⚖️ Legal	Case	7/23/2017	Housing Works	🟢
💰 Benefits	Referral	7/15/2017	Single Shop	🟢

Forms

NAME	UPDATED
NC Serves Clothing Assessment	8/31/2017
NC Serves Employment Assessment	Not Started
NC Serves Food Assessment	Not Started
Intake 1	7/25/2017
NC Serves Housing Assessment	8/31/2017
NC Serves Employment Assessment	Not Started

Timeline

JAN 16, 2018

- Address Added by Ashley Jones Long Name 3:11 p.m.
- Employment Case Closed by Ashley Jones Long Name 3:03 a.m.
- Resolution Resolved
 Outcome: Employed Full Time
 Exit Date: 1/16/2018
 Note: Client received full time employment as a Customer Service Representative at Target.
- Note Added to Employment Case by Ashley Jones Long Name 1:01 p.m.
- Interaction Type: Meeting
 Date: 1/16/2018
 Duration: 1h
 Note: Initial appointment with Barbara - we reviewed and made edits to her resume. She will send out to 3 companies for full time employment.
- Employment Referral Accepted by Ashley Jones Long Name 2:42 p.m.

JAN 11, 2018

- Employment Case Created by Ashley Jones Long Name 10:53 a.m.
- Organization: Employment Provider
 Description: Looking for full time employment, currently she is only working part time.
- Employment Referral Held for Review by Ashley Jones Long Name 9:13 a.m.

Clients Face Sheet

UNITE US Dashboard Clients Reports My Networks Sara Jones

Jane Smith CONSENT ACCEPTED VIEW/EDIT PROFILE

DOB 1/2/1984 (Age 35) | TEL 123-456-7890 | EMAIL jane.smith@email.com
 ADDRESS 99 Main Street, New York, AK 01303 | HOUSEHOLD 4 | HOUSEHOLD INCOME \$32,000
 PREFERRED METHOD OF CONTACT Message | BEST TIME TO CONTACT Afternoon

Mount Kisco Interfaith Food Pantry

Food Pantry
 9 300 East Main Street, Mount Kisco, NY 10549
 Today: 11:30 - 10:00 pm | OPEN NOW
 0.3 mi
 914-610-5187
 info@mountkiscofoodpantry.com

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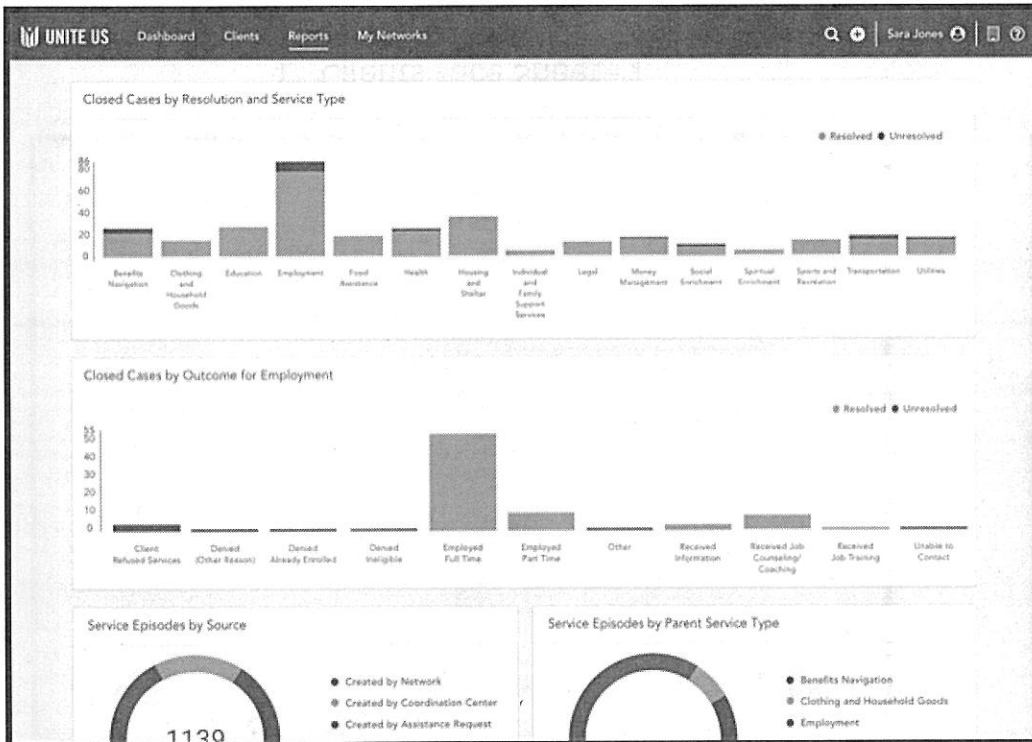
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Food Pantry
 9 300 East Main Street, Mount Kisco, NY 10549
 Today: 11:30 - 10:00 pm | OPEN NOW
 0.3 mi
 914-610-5187
 info@mountkiscofoodpantry.com

Search... SERVICE TYPE: Food
 17 Results for Food within 25 miles of Northern Westchester Hospital, 400 E Main St, Mt Kisco, NY 10549

Browsing Service Providers

NYC Veterans



Network Analytics/Data

NYC Veterans

3:01 vetconnectnyc.org

MENU

1-833-VETS-NYC REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

NYC

New York City Veteran Assistance

For veteran assistance, please call us at **1-844-347-9244** or fill out the form below.

First name *

Last name *

Date of birth *

MM-DD-YYYY

Phone number *

3:02 vetconnectnyc.org

Phone number *

Email address *

Military affiliation *

Select...

How did you hear about us?

VetConnectNYC receives all referrals and processes them within 2-3 days. If you are having feelings of hurting yourself or someone else - for free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, call 1-800-273-8255 (TALK), visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Crisis Chat webpage, or text the Crisis Text Line (text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the US and a trained Crisis Counselor will respond quickly).

What services are you seeking? *

Select...

Please describe your request for services *

Please sign in the box below to provide your consent to receive services

Please sign _____ provide

3:02 vetconnectnyc.org

Chat webpage, or text the Crisis Text Line (text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the US and a trained Crisis Counselor will respond quickly).

What services are you seeking? *

Select...

Please describe your request for services *

Please sign in the box below to provide your consent to receive services

CRISIS LINE

WHO HAVE SERVED

Submit

UNITE US Backend Interface





End of Demo

Thank you!



**Testimony of Mary Bier
National Director of Military Initiatives at Unite Us**

**New York City Council Committee on Veterans
September 17, 2019, 10am**

Good morning, Chairperson Deutsch and members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Mary Bier and I'm the National Director of Military Initiatives at Unite Us. I work directly with all of our military-connected networks, including VetConnectNYC, and support provider onboarding and engagement efforts, conduct software training for all users, and support the network data and reporting efforts managed by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families.

Unite Us is a veteran-led technology company that powers coordinated care networks of health and human service providers. In 2013, Unite Us was born after Dan Brillman, an Air Force Reserve Pilot, and Taylor Justice, an Army Veteran, reflected on their personal experiences transitioning out of the military. Both Dan and Taylor wanted to alleviate the problems veterans and their families experienced during the shift back to civilian life. They witnessed firsthand the complexities of navigating health and social services because of a fragmented delivery system and its negative impact on people's health. Dan and Taylor worked with groups like IVMF and DVS to expand this new model of care, which has now led to Unite Us' expansion across the country to serve every person in need.

Today, Unite Us is committed to building a system in which every person in need has simplified access to all the resources they are looking for—a truly interconnected system that starts in the community. We have become the leading social care coordination software that powers over 50 coordinated networks across 22 different states. This work, which started in NYC with our partners here today, has helped the entire health and human services industry adopt our innovative and proven model. The largest health systems, health plans, and governments across the country work with Unite Us as their trusted partners to integrate health and social services.

Kaiser Permanente has chosen Unite Us to power the network serving their 12.4 million members and CVS Health has chosen us to help some of Aetna's most vulnerable Medicaid and Dual eligible members. The state of North Carolina has also chosen Unite Us as their statewide infrastructure for the largest coordinated care network of its kind. We're proud that our solution has been validated by some of the leading government, healthcare, community, and philanthropic organizations in the country, and we couldn't have gotten to this point without our initial success helping veterans and their families.

Unite Us is the common technology platform that connects all of the service organizations together within VetConnectNYC. We empower health and human service providers to work together, integrating health and social care. With Unite Us, providers across sectors can send and receive secure referrals, track every person's total health journey, and report on tangible outcomes across a full range of services in a centralized, cohesive, and collaborative ecosystem. This social infrastructure helps communities transform their ability to track outcomes, improve health, and measure impact at scale. To learn more about our solution, you can visit www.UniteUs.com.

I'd like to thank the city of New York and the Department of Veteran Services, IVMF, and Northwell Health for their contributions to this network and commitment to improving health outcomes in our community. Thank you for your time!



Good morning councilmembers, my name is Matthew Ryba, I am a Marine Corps combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, and currently the outreach and education director at New-York Presbyterian's Military Family Wellness Center. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony today.

Most recent data collected from the American community survey and US Department of Veteran Affairs states there are over 220,000 military veterans currently living in the five boroughs of New York City. Recent studies have shown that of those veterans, 15 to 30% carry a diagnosis of PTSD or Major Depressive Disorder. Although publicly available treatment options such as the Veterans Administration (VA) healthcare system provide invaluable resources to this community, about 50% of veterans refuse or don't qualify for VA services, while their family members are usually excluded from accessing these services altogether.

Established in 2016, The New York–Presbyterian Military Family Wellness Center (MFWC) at Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC) and Weill Cornell Medicine (WCM) seeks to bridge this treatment divide by providing cost-free evidence-based assessment and treatment to local area veterans, active-duty service personnel, and their adult family members. Since its inception, the MFWC has prioritized collaborations with regional public and private institutions, seeking to complement existing resources rather than to compete with or replace them. One important community collaborator in our mission to provide these mental health resources to veterans and military families in NYC has been Vet Connect NYC (formally NY Serves).

Over the last three years, the MFWC, led by Professors Yuval Neria and JoAnn Difede, has served hundreds of NYC veterans, conducting 379 phone screens, 294 mental health intake assessments, and enrolling 244 veteran and military family member patients into our care. The primary conditions we treat are PTSD, major depression, anxiety disorders, and adjustment disorders (e.g., readjustment to civilian life). Both MFWC clinical sites, at the Columbia Veteran PTSD Research Center, and Weill Cornell Program for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress are in-network providers listed on Vet Connect NYC. Since our clinics have been registered as providers we have received close to 50 patient referrals from Vet Connect NYC, 30 cases of which we were able to accept for assessment or treatment. Although this number may not seem high, mental health is just one of many categories of resources available on Vet Connect NYC, and one that is not often sought after by comparison of some of the other categories of service.

This being said, we at the MFWC feel it is important to highlight that our clinics, along with other service providers listed on Vet Connect NYC are non-profit organizations, many who struggle to find funding in order to continue serving the veteran community of New York. While Vet Connect NYC serves an important purpose of connecting veterans to the resources they need, it is the nonprofit organizations providing veteran services that are equally in need of support in order to be able continue to offer these resources.

At the Military Family Wellness Center, our clinicians and researchers have unparalleled experience working with military service members of all duty status. Many of our civilian



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER

New York-Presbyterian
Military Family Wellness Center



Weill Cornell
Medicine

faculty, clinicians, and staff have decades of experience caring for service members and their families. Our staff also includes several veterans who know firsthand the psychological impact deployment and military severance may have on service members and their families.

Our innovative Center has distinct advantages in four areas: ease of access, minimal bureaucracy, confidentiality and privacy, and a wide range of high-quality treatment options. These treatments include short-term prolonged exposure therapy (PE), interpersonal therapy for PTSD and depression (IPT), and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), as well as pharmacotherapy, emotion focused therapy for couples, and group CBT for insomnia. To better facilitate patient care access, most psychotherapy treatments are also available via our telemedicine platform.

The challenges facing military families are enormous. Although the VA continues to provide most of the care, thousands of individuals seeking service-related mental health treatment in the New York region do not receive it. The MFWC has established a record of excellence in addressing these gaps in service. Through focus on ease of access, privacy, and high-quality care, we have become a recognized and valued resource in the local military family community. With the help of local government leaders, and community collaborators like Vet Connect NYC, we hope to expand our scope of service and provide vital treatment to this highly-valued but under-served population.

Councilmembers, thank you for your time,

Matthew Ryba

USMC Veteran OIF/OEF

Director of Community Outreach and Education

Military Family Wellness Center

New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center

New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medicine

T 347-949-1193

<http://www.nyp.org/mfwc>



Statement of Vadim Panasyuk
Senior Manager, Client Services
of
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Of America
before the
New York City Council Committee on Veterans

September 17, 2019

Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and our more than 425,000 members, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on the pending legislation. My name is Vadim Panasyuk. I am a New Yorker, a Ukrainian expatriate, a naturalized citizen, an Iraq war veteran having served two tours with the 3rd Infantry Division, and masters level social worker working as Senior Manager, Client Services with IAVA's Rapid Response Referral Program, or "RRRP" for short. RRRP is IAVA's high-tech, high-touch referral service for veterans and their families with a complete and comprehensive case management component. We assist veterans of all eras, with any discharge status, worldwide in confronting significant challenges like unemployment, financial or legal struggles, homelessness, and mental health-related issues. To date, RRRP has served almost 10,000 veterans and family members nationwide, and over 1,000 in New York City alone, providing critical support and resources to ensure that this city's veterans' needs are effectively met.

After fifteen years, IAVA has become the preferred empowerment organization for post-9/11 veterans. While our members are spread throughout the nation, we are proud to say that our national headquarters is located in New York City. Since its beginning, IAVA has fought for and has been successful in advocating for policies that are able to meet the needs of our newest generation of veterans, which includes our advocacy for the creation, proper funding, and oversight of the Department of Veterans Services (DVS).

DVS has enormous potential and its establishment was a historic moment for veterans of this city. DVS can serve to significantly streamline access and improve service delivery to many of the most critical veteran-specific programs and resources already available here. Today we are here to report what we are seeing on the ground as it relates to VetConnectNYC to better inform this Committee's decisions as they relate to the oversight of this critical program as it continues to take shape and deeper integrates into the services infrastructure of our great city.

To date, RRRP has assisted 168 VetConnectNYC clients. During the last four years at IAVA, I've had the pleasure to work with many at VetConnectNYC and I have found them to be mission-driven, very responsive, and easy to work with. Their diligence in follow-up with providers to ensure services are being delivered and their clients' needs are met is truly impressive. VetConnectNYC continues to stay proactive in collaboration with programs like ours

by scheduling annual meetings between RRRP and VetConnectNYC senior staff. This includes higher-level decision-makers, intending to elicit comprehensive feedback and ensure optimal collaboration. These meetings do bear fruit. For example: over the last few years we've been experiencing challenges in seamlessly receiving referrals. We are happy to report that due to wide-open channels of communication between our team and VetConnectNYC staff we've been able to better integrate VetConnectNYC referrals into our day-to-day workflow. The way their intake is structured helps us to not duplicate the work already done because we can clearly see what other services the veteran is already receiving.

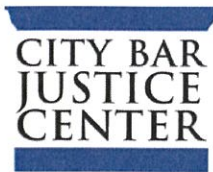
However, other challenges persist. We view the requirement to use the VetConnectNYC software to participate in the network to be a barrier, limiting the number and types of programs available through VetConnectNYC. Furthermore, we do not find the internal referral component comprehensive enough as it relates to programs and services represented there. The increase in the amount of digital paperwork needed to sync the work of our case management team and VetConnectNYC continues to be a hindrance as well.

Another clear deficit we can see is the lack of a comprehensive case management component and over-reliance on programs like ours to make connections to resources not available in the VetConnectNYC network of resources. This includes various Catholic Charities around the city, certain housing programs, as well as programs headquartered in other states which deliver emergency financial assistance, employment counseling and legal services on a national scope, thus further limiting options VetConnectNYC staff have when working to meet their clients' needs.

We are looking to DVS to adequately fund and expand VetConnectNYC. We support programs that deliver critical and relevant services to veterans in need quickly and effectively. After all, our own RRRP team has been pioneering this approach since 2012. We've been doing it on a national scale, with fewer resources and a smaller team. While our approach is similar, the deficiencies I have mentioned so far are stunting VetConnectNYC's growth, deeper integration into the veteran services infrastructure in New York City and nationally, and ultimately limit the potential of this program.

As VetConnectNYC continues to find its footing as a platform, we encourage this committee to provide them with the oversight and tools they need to be successful. We are hopeful that DVS will be able to find solutions to these issues as it continues to implement various program quality enhancements.

Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to share IAVA's views on these issues today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL VETERANS COMMITTEE

September 17, 2019 10 A.M.

Good morning Chairman Deutsch and good morning to the honorable members of this committee. My name is Kent Eiler and I'm the Project Director of the City Bar Justice Center's Veterans Assistance Project. The Justice Center is part of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York Fund, Inc., ("City Bar Fund"), the public service affiliate of the City Bar. Our mission is to leverage the resources of the New York City legal community to increase access to justice through pro bono volunteer lawyers. The City Bar Justice Center has been working with VetConnectNYC since its inception, back when it was still NYServes. City Bar staff have been trained on the procedures for using VetConnect's technology platform, attended VetConnect town hall meetings, and regularly interact and correspond with VetConnect staff. To their credit, the team at the VetConnect Coordination Center has been great at communicating with us and veterans often speak highly of the team members when our staff calls to follow up on a referral that was sent.

According to VetConnect's data, the City Bar has received 171 referrals, making us the seventh largest recipient of referrals in their system. We have noticed an increase in these referrals since their rebranding effort. Since their relaunch in November, the City Bar has received 73 referrals, virtually all of which were accurately referred. These referrals do turn into cases that we take on. Of the cases the City Bar accepted for representation this year, just under 40% started as referrals from VetConnect. However, to be clear, prior to NYServes and VetConnect, the City Bar's Veterans Assistance Project never had difficulty finding and intaking

they could find the City Bar Justice Center and see that we provide assistance with VA benefit matters. Then, if the veteran determined they could benefit from our services and clicked on our profile, instead of being directed to our contact information, they would be redirected to a portal encouraging them to contact VetConnectNYC so that VetConnect can be the one to put them in touch with us, adding a layer to the process. Similarly, when it comes to over-the-phone referrals, VetConnect sends the veteran's information to the service provider, but refrains from also providing the client the service provider's information. Providing both parties with each other's contact information would be the most practical way to ensure the veteran receives the information or resources they need. However, there is the appearance, at least to this provider, that there are incentives associated with keeping the veteran within VetConnect's tracking system to prevent this. We understand the interest in a single point of entry for purposes of tracking data, but we believe doing so should not add additional barriers to veterans accessing resources. We hope that there will be efforts to make VetConnectNYC more efficient and less costly and also that more attention will be paid to supporting the legal service providers who are crucial to helping those veterans denied benefits to appeal.

Ultimately, we are all here to help New York's veterans. We at the City Bar Justice Center hope, that in the future, veterans will be able to access those resources in the most efficient manner possible.

Thank you.



NYC Veterans Alliance

www.nycveteransalliance.org

www.ourveterans.nyc

Testimony Submitted by

NYC Veterans Alliance

**Committee on Veterans
Hearing on VetConnectNYC**

September 17, 2019

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the NYC Veterans Alliance, a member-driven, grassroots policy advocacy and community-building organization that advances veterans and families as civic leaders.

Veterans and families have long been in need of a centralized network for connecting with the benefits, services, and resources they have earned, and that a rich community of government, nonprofit, and for-profit entities are willing and able to offer them. We live in a city where it's possible to pinpoint, say, a restaurant that is open past 2am that can deliver a cheeseburger to your exact location. Yet far too often those who have served our nation search the web, make phone calls, and ask their friends for help in accessing better housing or employment options, or financial assistance, or healthcare benefits—and are scarcely able to scratch the surface of the resources available to help them on a local, state, and national level.

We applaud the city's adoption of VetConnectNYC last year, the result of an effort going back several years to bring the network previously called NY Serves within the purview of our city's agency serving veterans, military members, and their families. We have testified multiple times before this Committee in favor of its adoption and implementation, and it is indeed a mark of progress that this Committee now holds an oversight hearing on this important program and technology tool. There is much to say about the detail of the platform, how it operates, and its costs. In this testimony, we summarize the top three actions we recommend for this Committee:

- 1. Full support of VetConnectNYC as a clearinghouse for veterans, military members, and their families.** VetConnectNYC is today a new and still imperfect network, and we urge this Committee to fully support its continued growth, development, and usage as a network hub for our community. If there is a veteran-serving organization in your district, please urge them to be part of the network. If there are city services that a veteran, military member, or their families could benefit from, please ensure our community can access that service via VetConnectNYC. If you have veteran, military members, or their families as constituents, please refer them to services using VetConnectNYC. The full commitment of all those who serve veterans in NYC is needed to continue growing and improving VetConnectNYC as a network that will serve our community today and in the months and years ahead.
- 2. Encouraging design modifications to reduce barriers and “middleman” role.** We applaud the UniteUs developers for streamlining the intake process by recently implementing the “consent by attestation” feature that reduces a key barrier we have found for veterans seeking help by phone or email, which was the delay and difficulty in documenting client consent when they approached us remotely. We urge this Committee to facilitate the continued loop of feedback from users and clients to further improve this technology

platform to streamline how clients and organizations can utilize this network easily and effectively. We further encourage this Committee to support design improvements that can lead to future integrations of the network with other city, state, and national referral networks.

3. **Demanding robust follow-ups and qualitative metrics.** The most important measurement of VetConnectNYC is whether veterans, military members, and their families are able to access the services, benefits, and resources they need—and this can only be effectively assessed when the clients themselves share their experiences from start to finish. As VetConnectNYC continues to operate and improve, resources must be fully invested in connecting with those who have been served by the network to ensure a continuous feedback loop for assessing the network's performance.

We envision a future in which NYC leads the nation not only in development of top-of-the-line technology to serve our veterans and military community, but also in connecting it, person to person, with every level of government and the private sector to ensure our full community can access the rich resources our city can offer.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony today.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Rowan

Address: 80-45 Linden Ave NY NY 11379

I represent: Veteran Advocacy Board

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joseph Geraw

Address: 35 Penn Street

I represent: Dept Veterans Affairs

Address: Bronx, NY

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: 9-17-19

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Name: Coco Cullhane

Address: 40 Rocker

I represent: VETERAN ADVOCACY

Address: 40 Rocker

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

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Name: Rhonda Sherwin

Address: 1520 York Ave

I represent: Financial Coaching

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 6/17/19

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Name: Joe Hunt

Address: _____

I represent: Veterans Mental Health Coalition

Address: 50 Broadway NYC 10004

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 7/17/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vadim Parasyuk

Address: _____

I represent: Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: 9/17/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mary Bier

Address: 65 N. Moore Street, NYC, NY 10013

I represent: Unite Us

Address: same as above

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor in opposition

Date: 9/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MATTHEW RYBA

Address: 2310 24TH AVE ASTORIA NY

I represent: NEW YORK PRESBYTERIAN MILITARY FAMILY

Address: 1035 RIVERSIDE DR WILLMS CENTER
NY NY

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Name: Maureen Casey

Address: 150 Crouse Dr. Syracuse, NY

I represent: The Institute for Veterans & Military Families

Address: (same)

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Juan Serrano
Address: 2000 Marcus Ave, Lake Success, NY
I represent: Northwell Health
Address: 2000 Marcus Ave, Lake Success, NY

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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 in favor in opposition

Date: 9/17/2019

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Antonio M. Silva
Address: 330 S Service Road Melville NY
I represent: Northwell Health
Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kent Eiler
Address: City Bar Justice Center 42 West 44th NYC 10036
I represent: _____
Address: 42 West 44th Street New York NY 10036