

**Testimony of Commissioner James Hendon  
New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)  
New York City Council Committee on Veterans  
Jointly with the Committee on Small Business  
Oversight – Veteran Entrepreneurship and Public Contracting Opportunities  
October 13, 2022, 1:00 PM**

***Introduction***

Good afternoon, Chair Holden, Chair Menin, committee members and staff, Veterans, and advocates. My name is James Hendon, and I am proud to serve as the Commissioner for the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). I am joined today by DVS' Assistant Commissioner of Policy and Strategic Partnerships, Ellen Greeley, who oversees special programs and grants management, and Senior Policy Analyst Pedro Zapata. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues from the Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS) and from the New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS), Executive Deputy Commissioner, Dynishal Gross who will be available to answer questions from committee members.

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

***DVS' Services for Veteran Entrepreneurs***

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

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

NYC DVS supports Veteran entrepreneurs by connecting them to resources and services through our robust VetConnectNYC network. Our team of Care Coordinators utilize VetConnectNYC to connect Veteran entrepreneurs to outside organizations that provide unique programs offering a range of small business resources including access to capital, marketing development, business planning, and more.

Our agency website also provides information on a variety of programs and resources ranging from Starting a Small Business, Training Programs, Business Mentorship and Networking, Certifications, Business Reopening, Grants and Loans, Legal Services, Federal Relief, COVID-19 Relief, and mor

NYC DVS and SBS also collaborated to create an interactive online map known as VetBizNYC. VetBizNYC enables Veteran entrepreneurs to promote their businesses online and encourages the public to shop locally while also supporting those who served. Our map is currently home to over 300 Veteran owned businesses representing a cross-section of industries throughout the five boroughs including professional services, construction, maintenance and repair to name a few. DVS and SBS have also conducted outreach to encourage Veteran business owners to certify their businesses by applying to the Emerging Business Enterprise (EBE) Program and/or the Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE) Program.

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

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

In addition to the services and programs offered by NYC DVS, SBS has programming to help small businesses, including veteran-owned entrepreneurs start, operate and grow in the City. SBS helps minority and women-owned businesses (M/WBEs) get City-certified to compete for City government contracts and funding. SBS connects entrepreneurs to free resources ranging from business courses to legal services. They have programs to assist businesses navigate government rules and regulations, including providing free mock inspection services to identify violations in advance. The newly launched NYC Business Express Service Team (NYC BEST) provides business owners with one-on-one expert support on getting the appropriate licenses and permits needed, prepares them for inspections and helps them understand any violations they've received. SBS also helps businesses grow by providing access to capital through federal, state, local, and private funds including banks, credit unions and non-profit lenders. With our close partnership with SBS we get Veteran entrepreneurs connected to the right services to help them thrive.

***Int. No. 476/2022***

DVS is generally supportive of the goals identified in Int. 476-2022. This bill would require SBS and MOCS to enable Veteran owned Businesses to identify as such when enrolling to conduct business with the city. DVS fully supports the goals of this initiative. This bill would also require SBS, in collaboration with DVS, to create a Veteran Leadership Advisory Program. DVS welcomes the opportunity to continue working with its partners at SBS to grow the Veteran Business Leadership Academy the agency rolled out in April 2022.

***Conclusion***

Our City's Veterans represent the best of what we have to offer, and this Administration is committed to providing them with all the support they need upon their transition from military service as they build their economic futures. We thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter and look forward to any questions you or other Committee members may have.



**TESTIMONY OF VOLUNTEERS OF LEGAL SERVICE  
New York City Council Veterans and Small Business Committee  
Hearing on Veteran Entrepreneurship and Public Contract Opportunities  
October 13, 2022**

Good afternoon. My name is Andrea Tan. I am the Microenterprise Project Director at Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS). VOLS was established in 1984 and our purpose is to leverage private attorneys to provide free legal services to low-income New Yorkers to help fill the justice gap. For over 20 years the VOLS Microenterprise Project has helped existing and aspiring small business owners access high-quality free legal services from our dedicated staff and our network of pro bono attorneys. For many New Yorkers, owning a small business is an effective path out of poverty and into financial stability and independence. VOLS helps with entity formation, drafting and reviewing contracts, protecting intellectual property, among other transactional small business legal needs. We partner with community and economic development organizations to connect with clients who would benefit from our legal assistance, focusing on minority, women, immigrant, and veteran-owned businesses.

Our Microenterprise Project works together with our Veterans Initiative to connect with veterans' services organizations to help identify and serve veteran entrepreneurs and small business owners. We then help veteran entrepreneurs identify their legal needs and create an action plan to address them. By providing our clients access to high caliber pro bono attorneys at our partner law firms, we strive to level the playing field for veteran small business owners who are otherwise unable to pay the prohibitive cost of a lawyer.

VOLS recognizes New York City's efforts to better identify veteran businesses, support their growth and prepare those businesses for City procurement opportunities. The present proposed bill is an example of these efforts. The Department of Small Business Services, with the City's Chief Procurement Officer, would enable veteran owned businesses to identify as such when registering to do business with the City; and the City would create a Veteran Leadership Advisory Program to educate veteran owned businesses about city procurement opportunities. While this commitment to support veteran entrepreneurs is significant, it is also crucial that we focus on the implementation of this proposal, specifically on how the City would provide small businesses an opportunity to self-identify as "veteran owned" on the city website or in any other means of registration.

In working with individuals who have prior military service experience, we have observed that there are many variations in veteran identity that result from such factors as discharge status, serving in a politically controversial war, such as Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan; serving during peacetime; participating in combat; or having had an at least partly negative military experience associated with trauma or discrimination. Gender, race-ethnicity, sexual orientation, being born outside the United States, and other person-level characteristics may also affect veteran identity. Therefore, the City should consider how variation in veteran identity may affect participation in the proposed programs; and how to carefully assess veteran identity so that this vulnerable population does not get lost in the process.

The key to effectively screen for military service is to properly ask the question. Given the many variations in veteran identity shaped by an individual's unique military experience, it is not as simple as asking "Are you a veteran?" Many individuals may not consider themselves "veterans" or may believe that their military experience does not "count." For these reasons, it is important to screen in a manner that captures as many individuals as possible who served our country and are now business owners.

Our City's veterans represent the best of what we have to offer, and we should continue to strive to provide them with all the support they need upon their return home and as they build their economic futures. Thank you for allowing us to submit this testimony and for supporting the needs of New York City's veteran entrepreneurs.

Andrea Tan, Esq.  
VOLS Microenterprise Project Director



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October 13, 2022

Honorable Robert F. Holden, Chairperson  
Committee on Veterans

Honorable Julie Menin, Chairperson  
Committee on Small Business

Re: **LETTER IN SUPPORT OF INTRO 476-2022**

Dear Chairpersons Holden and Menin and Members of the Committees on Veterans and Small Business:

I am the Managing Director of Building Contractors Association, Inc. ("BCA") (see enclosed "Who Are We" document). The BCA and its 200 union contractor members have reviewed Intro 476-2022 and **support** this proposal.

I am a current Board member of NYC Helmets to Hardhats (<http://nyh2h.org>). NYC Helmets to Hardhats is dedicated to finding employment opportunities for veterans in the NYC unionized building trades. To date, over 3,000 veterans have found careers as members of the NYC unionized building trades. BCA members participate by employing veterans both as trade workers and as management personnel.

The BCA firmly supports any and all programs initiated by the City of New York to facilitate increased contracting opportunities for veteran owned business enterprises, especially those in the City's public works construction market.

The BCA appreciates your anticipated consideration of our support for this proposal. We are always willing to meet with you and your committees to discuss any and all issues related to New York City's construction industry. If you have any questions, please feel free to call.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John O'Hare".

John O'Hare  
Managing Director



## **BUILDING CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION, INC.**

### **Who Are We?**

The Building Contractors Association, Inc. (“BCA”) is Metropolitan New York’s leading membership association of unionized construction contractors. Since its formation in 1933, the BCA has represented and promoted the general welfare and interests of its construction industry employer members. The BCA provides the unified contractor voice needed to address and enter equitable long-term labor-management relationships. We are dedicated to establishing public confidence that a BCA member is a contractor of the highest integrity and responsibility. The BCA’s purposes also extend to the workers themselves. Long before it was required by law, BCA contractors have “encourage[d] the use of such means as will tend to reduce injury and death to building construction workers.”

The 200 plus members of the BCA represent the finest of New York’s builders. Forty percent of the Metropolitan areas largest construction firms are BCA members.<sup>1</sup> Many more are small family owned businesses. One multi-generational company has been in business for over 125 years. Other members represent the continuing growth of minority and women owned construction firms. Almost twenty five percent of BCA members are certified MWBE contractors. BCA member projects line the streets and skyline of the City of New York. They have employed generations of unionized construction workers providing solid, well-paying jobs to thousands of New Yorkers. They represent the proud tradition of New York’s quintessential construction industry.

The projects BCA contractors perform encompass every aspect of the construction process including high-rise office buildings, residential structures, hospitals and schools. In addition, BCA members have extensive experience in the fields of restoration, renovation, alteration and tenant changes. Our members perform work in both the public and private sectors of the construction industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Crain’s, 2020 List of NY Area’s Largest Construction Firms, July 27, 2020, pages 1-12.



Studies show that even during the current pandemic and resulting economic downturn, New York City's construction industry will generate approximately \$55.5 billion in total spending with expectations that spending will reach \$168.5 between 2020 and 2022.<sup>2</sup> New York City's construction industry is an essential economic engine.

BCA members are actively interested in promoting and protecting the varied interests and issues related to New York's building and construction industry. The BCA is committed to the strength of the City of New York.

What we believe:

- Continued commercial and residential development is critical to maintaining the City of New York as the world's greatest city
- City and State support for public works projects is essential
- Stable labor-management relationships are essential to the well-being of the construction industry
- Construction industry is fully committed to safety first
- Developers, contractors and labor must work together to address high costs of construction work
- Opportunity is the gateway to success

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<sup>2</sup> New York Building Congress October 2020 report.

NY Helmets to Hardhats Testimony for Veterans and Small Business  
Committee hearing on Int 0476-2022:

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*"Veteran Entrepreneurship and Public Contract Opportunities"*

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Good afternoon & thank you for allowing me a few minutes to offer testimony in favor of Int 0476-2022.

My name is Anne Trenkle. I am the Executive Director of New York Helmets to Hardhats.

Since 2003, when the Helmets to Hardhats Program launched here in New York City, approximately 3,000 prior and current military members have begun careers with the NY Building Trades Unions. Most service members began as apprentices, learning their craft and becoming Journey Men & Women. Some of our military members sought out career opportunities with Building Trades Employers, beginning as Assistant Project Managers, Estimators, Schedulers, etc.

These veterans are now in the position to become business owners, to give back to the veteran community by employing fellow service members and giving them an opportunity to move into the middle class; to begin a career that will sustain them and their families; to work safely; and, to retire in dignity.

This bill, which would require the Department of Small Business Services with the City's Chief Procurement Officer, to enable veteran owned businesses to self-identify as such when registering with the City as well as offering a Veteran Leadership Advisory Program to support the enterprise throughout the procurement process is, in my opinion,

long overdue. I have witnessed the success when veterans are mentored vs the ones who are left to figure things out on their own. Veterans are eager to learn; eager to make their mark on the world; eager to provide for their families; eager to continue learning; eager to make a difference.

Removing the obstacle of understanding and navigating the procurement process will benefit not only the existing veteran owned businesses; but, will encourage an influx of new veteran entrepreneurs to seek out new opportunities as New York City business owners.



**Testimony of Alexa Modero, Director of NYU Veterans Future Lab**  
before  
**The New York City Council Committee on Veterans**  
and  
**The New York City Council Committee on Small Business**

**October 13, 2022**

Chairperson Holden, Chairperson Menin, and fellow Council Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the New York University Tandon School of Engineering's Veterans Future Lab (VFL). We are pleased to share how VFL is empowering New York City veterans and helping them thrive in their post-military service careers. NYU recognizes the challenges veterans face when reintegrating post-service, and we are committed to providing effective, tangible solutions.

Operated by NYU Tandon and launched in 2017, VFL helps early-stage companies created by veterans, or their spouses, transform into successful businesses by providing the guidance, expertise, and resources that startups need to succeed. The incubator is a public-private-academic partnership where entrepreneurs are nurtured by university partners with support from government and the private sector. By leveraging the wealth of talent and diverse skill sets found in the New York City Veterans Community, we are able to accelerate the growth of new ventures and bring economic activity to the area.

VFL is home to two premier entrepreneurship programs: Apex and Veterans Entrepreneurship Training programs (VET) I and II. Apex is a 9-month no-cost startup business incubation program that provides mentorship, support, and resources needed to start and grow high-impact companies. Veterans Entrepreneurship Training I and II is a free multi-week, skills-focused program for early-stage and aspiring entrepreneurs. VET-I is an introductory educational program for active-duty service members, US military veterans, and their spouses new to the entrepreneurship space. VET-II reinforces business fundamentals and introduces intermediate frameworks essential to the launch of ventures by US service members, veterans, and military spouses.

Since 2015, VFL has graduated 285 students and supported over 70 ventures. Currently, VFL is home to 10 Apex incubator companies (after graduating a cohort of 11 companies in May), and 30 VET-I participants (the third VET cohort this year). We continue to work with our partners, including Barclays, ESDC, NYS Assembly, and Goodwin, to ensure the continued growth and success of our work.

In 2021, VFL released a study, [The Veteran Journey to Entrepreneurship](#), which aimed to capture veterans' experiences along their entrepreneurship journey, including challenges, successes, resources used, and lessons learned. The study also gathered perspectives from active-duty Service members and Reservists who may embark on the entrepreneurship journey in the future. These perspectives can help program implementers and policymakers understand the characteristics and motivations of future entrepreneurs to better tailor support for this group. Key findings included the following:

- Veteran entrepreneurship correlates with socioemotional well-being.
- The top challenges faced by veteran entrepreneur respondents include marketing, personal

finances, and lack of initial capital.

- Professional networks, informal relationships, and professional development programs rank among the most useful resources for veteran entrepreneurs.
- The experience in the military and transition to civilian life play key roles in future entrepreneurship.

The veteran journey to entrepreneurship can be longer than that of its civilian counterpart, though the costs of service come with the advantages of military training and experience. VFL is greatly optimistic about the future of veteran entrepreneurship in New York City and across the country. With our private and public partners, we look forward to continue improving the lives of veterans and their families.

Lastly, I would like to comment on Int 0476-2022. VFL strongly supports the City Council's efforts to level the playing field for our veterans. On behalf of the 70 start-ups VFL has housed and the 189 veterans who have traversed VET-I and II, we strongly urge the City to promote equality of economic opportunities for veterans and to eliminate barriers to their participation in City procurement activities. We believe Int 0476-2022 is a step in the right direction.

Int 0476-2022 also proposes the creation of a Veteran Leadership Advisory Program to educate veteran owned business enterprises about City procurement opportunities. Should Int 0476-2022 become law, I would welcome any opportunity to participate in the Program and leverage the wealth of knowledge and energy of the VFL community to further its mission.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We welcome any questions the Committees may have. (Please contact Konstantine Tettonis, NYU Government Affairs, kt1249@nyu.edu)



Testimony before the New York City Council  
Committee on Veterans and Committee on Small Business  
October 13, 2022

Richard Ralph, Training and Quality Control Manager, City Beet Kitchens  
Project Renewal

*Project Renewal's mission is to end the cycle of homelessness by empowering individuals and families to renew their lives with health, homes, and jobs.*

[www.projectrenewal.org](http://www.projectrenewal.org)

My name is Richard Ralph. I am a veteran and I am employed as the Training and Quality Control Manager at City Beet Kitchens, a social-purpose catering company run by the homeless services nonprofit Project Renewal.

For more than 54 years, Project Renewal has empowered individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness to renew their lives. Each year Project Renewal serves thousands of New Yorkers—including hundreds of veterans like me—through wrap-around services focused on health, homes, and jobs.

I am grateful to Speaker Adams, Chair Holden, Chair Menin, and the City Council for your dedication to veterans. The City Council has generously supported Project Renewal's homeless prevention services for veterans across all of its health, homes, and jobs programs.

In FY22, Project Renewal served 194 veterans. This included:

- providing health care to 141 veterans at four clinics located within the organization's shelters and three mobile care vans;
- welcoming 41 veterans into emergency shelters;
- ensuring 61 additional veterans were safely housed within Project Renewal, where they benefitted from enhanced services, including occupational therapy, hot meal delivery, and tele-psychiatry to combat stress and anxiety;
- and providing job training and placement services to 26 veterans.

This support personally made a big difference in my life.

I worked hard to get to where I am today, and my journey has not always been easy. I am proud to have served our country in the Marine Corps from 2001 to 2005, and the Army National Guard from 2006 to 2013. I was deployed to Afghanistan, serving overseas in 2012.

When I finished my term of service, I had a hard time readjusting to civilian life, and unfortunately I was incarcerated for five years. Upon my release, I was eager to renew my life, and that's when I found Project Renewal.

In 2018, I enrolled in Project Renewal's Culinary Arts Training Program (CATP) – which, I am grateful to say, is funded by the City Council. CATP trains New Yorkers who face challenges to securing employment, like histories of justice involvement, for careers in the culinary field.

Upon completing the program, the Project Renewal team was impressed by my hard work and dedication, and I was hired as a Junior Cook at its catering company, City Beet Kitchens. Since then, I have been promoted twice.

I now oversee the service we allocate to contracts with other homeless shelters to provide food for their residents; assess food quality; address discrepancies; and take feedback to figure out how we can improve.

I enjoy the feeling of giving back by providing quality food to shelter residents and other New Yorkers in need, and I love the positivity of the mission of Project Renewal. After serving my country, it is a good feeling to know I am still giving back in my career today.

Project Renewal supports Int. 0476-2022 because it would empower more veteran-owned businesses to do business with the City. It's a common-sense way to stand up for New Yorkers who bravely served our country. I am grateful for Chair Holden's sponsorship of this bill.

Project Renewal helped brighten up a dark part of my life after incarceration by helping me get back to work. Every veteran should have these kinds of opportunities if they fall on hard times. I hope the New York City Council will continue to provide funding to Project Renewal's programs that support veterans, so that more people can find hope, like I did.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



**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: Thur, Oct 13, 2022

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tehuti El-Bez ex fel LOVELLE SHAW

Address: E Gun Hill Rd.

I represent: Moorish/Black Communities

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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 in favor     in opposition

Date: 10/13/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Tan (Volunteers of Legal

Address: 40 Worth St Service) Prospect

I represent: Volunteers of Legal Service

Address: 40 Worth St

**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: Maria Osorio

Address: Mayor's Office of Contract

I represent: Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Sullivan

Address: 255 Greenwich

I represent: Mayor's Office of Contract Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: 10/13/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ellen Grady, LLC for Policy &

Address: DVS Strategic Partnerships

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/13/2022

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PEDRO ZAPATA

Address: 1 Centre St.

I represent: NYC DVS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



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



**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: 10/13/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner James Hendon

Address: 1 Centre St, Suite 2208, NY, NY

I represent: NYC Department of Veterans Services

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: Frank Visich

Address: 736 Broadway, 4<sup>th</sup> Fl.

I represent: Disabled Vendor

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: Andraisha Gross

Address: 4055 Manhattan Business Services

I represent: JCCA

Address: 425 Westchester Avenue, 10455

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 476 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/13/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alexa Modero

Address: Bright St. Jersey City, NJ 07302

I represent: NYU Tandon Veterans Future Lab

Address: 370 Jay St, Brooklyn, NY

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**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: RABAH BELKEBIR

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Disabled Veterans Street Vendors

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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