

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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June 17, 2009
Start: 1:20pm
Recess: 2:44pm

HELD AT: Committee Room
City Hall

B E F O R E: JAMES SANDERS, JR.
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Tony Avella
Lewis A. Fidler
Letitia James

A P P E A R A N C E S

Garrie Moore
Vice Chancellor for Student
City University of New York

Wilfred Cotto
University Coordinator for Veterans Affairs
City University of New York

Tom Popowich
Veteran and student
Hunter College, PROVE

Kinda Ford
Veteran and Student
Hunter College

Jason Ortiz
Program Director
New Era Veterans SRO

Thomas Mulfield
Retired Director
New Era Veterans

Oronda Tacuma
Co-founder
Black Veterans for Social Justice

Dan Rossi

COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: Good

afternoon, everyone. As you can see, I am not Council Member Sanders. Once again, I am standing in for the Chair of this Committee. I've done this on a couple of occasions. We're obviously here today to have a hearing to examine the services provided to military veterans at the City University of New York.

New York City is home to approximately 270,000 veterans, according to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Of these veterans, approximately 40,000 are between the ages of 17 and 44. Another 83,000 are between the ages of 45 and 64. Many of these veterans, along with those returning from overseas tours of duty, may benefit from educational and career training to develop or enhance their employment opportunities. It is well recognized that access to higher education is crucial to upward mobility in the United States. Two years of post-secondary education has become the baseline for future success. Generally, the higher the level of educational attainment, the more a person will earn over their lifetime. Further, an educated

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2 workforce is central to the development and
3 sustainability of communities with the largest
4 predictor of economic wellbeing in cities being
5 its percentage of college graduates.

6 I know we're going to hear some
7 very interesting testimony. And, I know CUNY has
8 always been at the forefront of providing veterans
9 services. And, they are our first panel. So, I'd
10 like to call CUNY up.

11 FEMALE VOICE: Carrie Moore, Thomas
12 Popowich, Wilfred Cotto and Kinda Foro.

13 GARRIE MOORE: Okay. Good
14 afternoon, Chairperson Avella and members of the
15 Committee and staff. Thank you so very much for
16 this wonderful opportunity to represent CUNY and
17 to engage in a conversation about our veterans. I
18 am Garrie Moore, Vice Chancellor for Student
19 Affairs at The City University of New York. I am
20 grateful to have the opportunity to speak to you
21 this afternoon about CUNY's services for veterans.

22 Testifying with me today are
23 Wilfred Cotto, a veteran and the University
24 Director of Veterans Affairs, who will offer
25 detailed information about CUNY's veteran services

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2 and operations and, two CUNY students who will
3 speak to their specific experiences. Tom
4 Popowich, a veteran at Hunter College and a staff
5 member of Hunter's PROVE program and Kinda Ford, a
6 veteran and student at Hunter College, and
7 employee of the CUNY Central Office.

8 All of us at CUNY are profoundly
9 grateful for our veterans' service and their many
10 contributions to our country and, our University.
11 In turn, we are proud to serve our student
12 veterans by helping them advance through high-
13 quality academic opportunities. Our Office of
14 Veterans Affairs is actively engaged in reaching
15 our student veterans and offers a comprehensive
16 and carefully developed array of services. As a
17 Vietnam-era veteran myself, I take a special
18 interest in ensuring that veterans find at CUNY
19 the specific resources they need to successfully
20 meet their educational goals.

21 Currently, there are more than
22 1,700 student veterans enrolled at CUNY. This
23 places the University in the top 10 for veteran
24 student enrollment among the country's higher
25 education institutions. The University's student

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2 veteran population has grown by about 10% every
3 year since 2004. We anticipate further growth as
4 service members return to the New York City area
5 from Iraq and Afghanistan. Our student veteran
6 population grows, so does the demand for veterans
7 services. The City Council's assistance in
8 helping us to meet this demand is critical to our
9 efforts.

10 The University and its campuses
11 provide a range of academic and support services
12 to ease veteran students' transition to college
13 and civilian life, including academic advising;
14 counseling, particularly for post-deployment
15 issues; advice on financial aid and benefits; and
16 job placement and counseling. In addition,
17 outreach efforts are an important part of our
18 commitment to encourage veterans' participation in
19 higher education. Both the University's Central
20 Office and its colleges work closely with the
21 Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and community
22 groups in all five boroughs.

23 Assisting our students in accessing
24 available financial benefits is also a priority,
25 especially those benefits related to the enhanced

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2 Post-9/11 GI Bill and the New York State Veterans
3 Tuition Award. You will hear more about that a
4 little later when Wilfred Cotto testifies.

5 In all of these activities, the
6 University's central Office of Veterans Affairs
7 works collaboratively with veterans offices
8 throughout our system. Our goal is to ensure the
9 quality and availability of student programs and
10 services and to be a comprehensive resource for
11 students, campuses and the community. In
12 particular, we have established mechanisms to
13 ensure that the campuses can access available
14 funding through a certified and centralized RFP
15 process that emphasizes accountability and
16 quality.

17 Our robust veterans services are
18 reaching more students than ever and constantly
19 evolving to meet the specific needs of our student
20 veterans. To build on our efforts, we ask the
21 City Council to continue its funding for CUNY's
22 veterans services, which was at the \$500,000 level
23 this year. In addition, directing funds for
24 veterans services toward CUNY's Office of
25 Veterans' Affairs would enable the University to

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2 maximize the use of the funds through an
3 efficient, centralized process, as we have done in
4 the past.

5 My colleague, University Director
6 of Veterans Affairs Wilfred Cotto, will now offer
7 the Committee details about the funding process
8 and about all of the initiatives and issues I have
9 mentioned. Wilfred.

10 WILFRED COTTO: Thank you, Vice
11 Chancellor Moore. Good afternoon, Chairperson
12 Avella and members of the Committee. I am Wilfred
13 Cotto, University Coordinator for Veterans'
14 Affairs. I am grateful to have this opportunity
15 to speak with you today about CUNY's programs and
16 services for our returning veterans and
17 reservists.

18 At CUNY we understand that, as an
19 institution, our profound gratitude for our
20 veterans' enormous contributions to this country
21 is best expressed through resources that will
22 enhance their educational and employment
23 opportunities and advance their personal and
24 professional aspirations. As a 28-year veteran of
25 the United States Navy, and a combat veteran of

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2 Persian Gulf, OEF and OIF, I take very special
3 interest in ensuring that veterans find, at CUNY,
4 the specific resources they need to successfully
5 meet their educational, career and personal goals.

6 As Vice Chancellor Moore said, the
7 University's student veteran population continues
8 to grow. The availability of the enhanced Post-
9 9/11 educational benefits and the New York State
10 Veterans' Tuition Award makes CUNY an even more
11 attractive and viable option for veterans.

12 The Post-9/11 GI Bill will come
13 into effect for training on August the 1st, 2009.
14 This program will pay tuition and fees directly to
15 the school, not to exceed the maximum in-state
16 tuition and fees at a public institution of higher
17 learning. It will also pay a monthly housing
18 allowance based on the basic allowance for housing
19 for an E-5 with dependents at the location of the
20 school. And, let me take a moment to give an
21 example. If a student veteran is attending one of
22 our schools in the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens or
23 Brooklyn, at the moment, the BAH rate for an E-5
24 with dependent is \$2,744 a month. That would be
25 the living stipend that this individual would

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2 gain. In Staten Island, it's a little bit less
3 due to cost of living adjustments. But, it's
4 about \$1,900 in Staten Island. So, it's
5 definitely a big incentive for them to go to
6 school fulltime and devote themselves to their
7 studies and pursue education.

8 In addition, an annual book and
9 supply stipend of \$1,000 a month would be paid to
10 the veteran.

11 For the 2008-2009 academic year,
12 The New York State Veterans' Tuition Award was set
13 at 98% of tuition, or \$4,287.50, whichever is
14 less, for eligible veterans who are New York State
15 residents discharged under honorable conditions
16 from the U.S. Armed forces. Veterans from the
17 Vietnam era, Persian Gulf era, Afghanistan era and
18 veterans of the armed forces of the United States
19 who serve in hostilities that occurred after
20 February 28, 1961, and were awarded Armed Forces
21 Expeditionary Medal, Navy Expeditionary Medal, or
22 Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal would be eligible
23 for the State award.

24 Through our collaborative efforts
25 with campus veterans liaisons, campus student

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2 veteran clubs, faculty and staff, as well as the
3 use of technology, e-mail, Facebook, flyers,
4 mailings, meetings, conferences, CUNY is doing all
5 it can to ensure that student veterans are
6 informed about, and can access, their educational
7 benefits.

8 While student veterans contribute
9 richly to University life, they also encounter
10 considerable challenges to their transition from
11 military to college and civilian life that put
12 them at risk for attrition. Among other
13 transitional issues, they must adjust to college
14 culture, which is considerably less rigidly
15 structured and more self-directed than the
16 military. They must endure the academic and
17 social disruption of being recalled to active
18 duty. They often must manage impact of
19 significant service-related disabilities,
20 including TBI, traumatic brain injury, PTSD,
21 social, emotional, physical and other
22 psychological disabilities. And, they must
23 navigate through complex bureaucratic structures
24 in order to receive critical veterans services and
25 benefits.

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2 Despite its modest resources in
3 this area, CUNY is working diligently to meet the
4 considerable needs of this high-risk, and highly
5 deserving, student population. CUNY presently
6 lacks a budgetary line item for services to
7 student veterans and reservists. As a result,
8 systemwide there are only five higher education
9 professionals dedicated fulltime to serving
10 student veterans. Presently, veterans' services
11 on most campuses are loosely coordinated by
12 college student service professionals, most of
13 whom have veterans' service responsibilities as a
14 small part of often a larger professional
15 portfolio, which dilutes their efforts to serve
16 student veterans and reservists in a meaningful
17 way.

18 Allow me to offer a brief summary
19 of some of the resources that presently support
20 student veterans and reservists at CUNY. I will
21 also make reference to some of the brochures and
22 handouts that you have before you. The Office of
23 Veterans' Affairs, my office, is staffed by one
24 fulltime University Coordinator and a half-time
25 Assistant Coordinator. This office is responsible

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2 for coordination, outreach, recruitment,
3 retention, programs and services available to the
4 University's student veteran population.

5 The CUNY Office of Admission
6 Services is staffed by one half-time veterans'
7 recruitment coordinator responsible for outreach
8 and recruitment, and conducting a biweekly CUNY
9 Information Session for returning veterans and
10 reservists.

11 The Hunter School of Social Work
12 Project for Return and Opportunity in Veterans
13 Education, we call it PROVE, is dedicated to
14 increasing support and services to returning
15 Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring
16 Freedom veterans, as well as other student
17 veterans. The project complements and enhances
18 what limited resources are already in place at
19 several CUNY campuses to ensure returning veterans
20 a smooth transition and a successful readjustment
21 back into civilian life and student life. The
22 Central Office of Student Affairs provides funding
23 resources to hire a fulltime field instructor and
24 stipends for graduate student interns in support
25 of the project. My colleague, Tom Popowich, will

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describe the project more in detail.

The CUNY Veterans' Affairs Web site is a virtual one-stop source of information for returning military veterans and their families. It is a guide to educational benefits, entitlement, counseling, advocacy resources, and the latest news in veterans affairs. Students can also register to become a CUNY VIP to receive veteran-related communication and can link to the CUNY Student Veteran Facebook page to meet other CUNY veterans in that social network. And, we have an example there of some of the website pages and how they can access information on veterans' affairs and enrolling and admissions and all kind of things at CUNY.

Our Annual CUNY Veteran College Fair is geared specifically for veterans to learn how CUNY can help them transition from military to academic life. Participants have the opportunity to speak with admissions professionals from CUNY colleges regarding all academic programs. College veteran liaisons and current students are also on hand to answer questions and offer guidance.

The Annual CUNY Student Veteran

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2 Conference features experts offering up to date GI
3 Bill and VA benefits and answering questions
4 regarding financial aid and career, transition,
5 and employment assistance. Participants are also
6 able to network and connect with other vets.

7 CUNY now also offers an
8 Application Fee Waiver to all returning veterans.

9 Community-based partnerships
10 continue to be an area of emphasis. The CUNY
11 Office of Veterans Affairs has cultivated strong
12 community-based collaborations with numerous City,
13 state, and federal agencies, in addition to
14 various local community-based organizations in an
15 effort to better outreach, inform, provide better
16 services to the New York City veterans community.
17 Examples of such collaborations and partnerships
18 include, but are not limited to, the U.S.

19 Department of Veterans Administration in New York
20 City Regional Office, The New York State Division
21 of Veterans Affairs, the Mayor's Office of
22 Veterans Affairs, the VA Vet Centers throughout
23 the five boroughs, the Bronx Borough Presidents
24 Office of Veteran Affairs, New York City Veteran
25 Resource Centers, Student Veterans of America, the

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2 Jewish Board of Family and Children Services,
3 their Veterans Initiative, Iraq and Afghanistan
4 Veterans of America, Fort Hamilton and Fort Totten
5 Army Garrisons, Fort Schuyler Navy Operation
6 Support Center, and NYPD and FDNY Veteran
7 Associations.

8 The University has also established
9 a process to fund projects at campuses. In the
10 academic year 2008 and 2009, the CUNY Office of
11 Student Affairs funded 12 projects through an RFP
12 process at the following campuses; Borough of
13 Manhattan Community College, New York City College
14 of Technology, Hunter College, John Jay College,
15 College of Staten Island, Kingsborough Community
16 College, Lehman College, Hostos Community College,
17 Baruch College, Queens College, City College and
18 Queensborough Community College. In addition to
19 the funded projects, there are also established
20 student veteran programs at La Guardia Community
21 College and Brooklyn College.

22 These student-centered RFP projects
23 identify and develop best practices in
24 facilitating outreach to veterans, promote program
25 enhancement for student veteran retention, work to

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2 strengthen the academic success of student
3 veterans, and enrich the diversity of student life
4 throughout the University. Areas of emphasis
5 given priority in this competitive RFP process
6 include outreach to veterans and reservists,
7 retention of student veterans and reservists,
8 promoting successful transitions for veterans and
9 reservists, with particular focus on re-entry into
10 higher education system, helping student veterans
11 effectively access government and community
12 resources, supporting the needs of women student
13 veterans, supporting the needs of veterans with
14 disabilities, developing student leaderships among
15 veterans, and acknowledging the skills veterans
16 bring to the campuses, and to utilize those skills
17 throughout the University.

18 In order to meet the needs of this
19 deserving student population, CUNY must continue
20 to invest in its student veteran service
21 infrastructure. We would particularly appreciate
22 the support of the City Council with providing
23 additional funding to the University centrally to
24 hire fulltime student affairs professionals on
25 each campus, whose sole responsibility is to

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2 coordinate services for student veterans that
3 support success and wellbeing of student veterans.

4 On behalf of all those who serve
5 CUNY's student veterans, thank you for your
6 interest in, and support of, services to CUNY
7 students who have so selfishly served their
8 country. Thank you.

9 THOMAS POPOWICH: Good afternoon,
10 Chairperson Avella and members of the Committee.
11 My name is Thomas Popowich, and I'm here today
12 representing the Project for Return and
13 Opportunity in Veterans Education, PROVE, at the
14 Hunter College School of Social Work. I come to
15 you today, first as a veteran of Lebanon, and
16 second, as a Hunter College School of Social Work
17 student, and as a social work intern serving the
18 student veteran population of CUNY through PROVE.
19 I also come before you today as a proud and
20 grateful citizen of this great City and nation. I
21 would also like to take this opportunity to thank
22 those who have proudly served this great nation,
23 and those who faithfully support them.

24 During the past academic year, it
25 has been my honor and privilege to serve the

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2 student veteran population of CUNY through my
3 affiliation with PROVE. The mission of PROVE is
4 to assist student veterans in making a successful
5 transition from military to academic life. Based
6 upon a model of vets-helping-vets, PROVE provides
7 social work interns who in turn provide counseling
8 and support services to the student veterans of
9 Hunter College, John Jay and, the Borough of
10 Manhattan Community College, while at the same
11 time seeking to promote and create a thriving
12 community of student veterans at those three
13 campuses. PROVE community organizers have also
14 outreached student veterans at several other CUNY
15 campuses.

16 The overall strategy of PROVE is
17 based upon the premise that the best way to help a
18 student veteran to succeed is by encouraging as
19 many of them as possible to actively participate
20 in the veteran community on their campus, where
21 they can interact with other student veterans,
22 exchange information, give and receive help, as
23 well as engage with PROVE interns. It is through
24 such engagement within a viable community can a
25 struggling student be identified and given the

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help they need.

So what have we accomplished?

During the past academic year, the PROVE staff has outreached over 500 student veterans throughout CUNY. Of those 500, 160 student veterans were interviewed and assessed by social work interns at the three primary PROVE campuses. Any student with an identified need was then provided either counseling services by PROVE interns, or given appropriate referrals to outside agencies. During the year, PROVE interns have also taken groups of student vets to enroll at the VA. They have organized and planned well attended social events and outings. They have provided individual and group counseling, and facilitated a number of workshops.

At Hunter College, we were very engaged with a small but thriving group of about 15 to 20 vets. Early in the semester, we identified several struggling vets, including some who were experiencing difficulties as the direct consequence of their exposure to war. But since those vets were active participants in their vet club, and thus actively engaged with PROVE

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interns, those vets received timely and appropriate interventions, and are now thriving in school. So, what I can say with certainty is what we do works. What I cannot say with certainty, however, is how many student veterans are there who were not successful, and who may otherwise have been successful had they been engaged either in a vet club or with PROVE interns. Indeed, this is the number one question, and part of the reason why I'm here today.

The other day I received a phone call from a counselor we work with at the VA. He had a woman vet in his office, a veteran of Iraq, who was looking for help to get back into school. She had failed her first and only semester because she was dealing with combat related issues. Suffice to say, had she possibly been engaged with her campus vet club or PROVE interns, her outcome might have been different. Needless to say, now getting her back into school is one of our main objectives.

What is clear, esteemed members of this Committee, is that out of the thousands of student veterans throughout CUNY, or even the 120

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2 or so veterans at Hunter, PROVE is only scratching
3 the surface. We all know that with the new GI
4 Bill, and with thousands of vets coming home every
5 day, that the number of student veterans enrolled
6 at CUNY is going to increase, and increase
7 significantly. Because our project is limited
8 both in fundings and resources, we are also thus
9 limited in both size and scope. And though we are
10 confident that what we are doing is making a
11 difference to the vets we work with, we are also
12 gravely concerned about the fate of the vets we do
13 not. This is where your help is so urgently
14 needed. CUNY is committed to providing a world-
15 class education to our student veterans, and has
16 demonstrated that commitment over and over again
17 by providing quality programs and services to
18 student vets. But what we urgently need to do is
19 to significantly expand the size and scope of our
20 programs and services if we are to have any chance
21 at meeting the growing need of this burgeoning
22 population.

23 That is why we are before this
24 esteemed Committee today, as old warriors looking
25 for a hand out, so our young warriors can have a

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2 better future. And it is only with your help,
3 that we can set the standard that no vet will be a
4 preventable casualty on the home front. That is,
5 with your help, we can ensure that no veteran is
6 MIA, missing in America. Failure is not an
7 option. From this day forward, no vet should go
8 missing on our streets, missing in our homes and
9 workplace, or missing from the classrooms of our
10 City University system. Please help CUNY to
11 realize its vision of being the national model for
12 veteran's education and give our veterans the
13 education they've earned and deserve. Thank you.
14 I now yield to my colleague, Kinda Ford.

15 KINDA FORD: Good afternoon,
16 Chairperson Avella and members of the Committee.
17 My name is Kinda Ford and I'm a veteran graduate
18 student at the City University of New York. Of
19 all the testimony that you've heard today, mine
20 will be the shortest because the fact that I'm
21 sitting here is testimony to all that CUNY is
22 doing to help veterans.

23 I was excited when I was offered
24 the opportunity to speak before you today. As a
25 veteran, I can attest to the fact that the City

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2 University of New York gave me access to a great
3 education. Apart from an exceptional learning
4 environment, having a veteran center on campus
5 where I was given guidance, mentoring and a sense
6 of camaraderie was helpful in easing my transition
7 to post-military academic life.

8 In my first semester at Brooklyn
9 College, I felt really out of place and, you know,
10 really lost on campus. And, I would say that if
11 it wasn't for my veterans affairs coordinator that
12 I may not be sitting here before you today. As a
13 student, a parent and a fulltime employee, the
14 veterans club helped me to overcome many
15 obstacles, such as childcare, juggling work and
16 school and employment. Her timely interventions
17 helped me to navigate college life successfully.
18 So much so, that I, in turn, became the President
19 of the Veterans Students' Organization at Brooklyn
20 College to help other veteran students succeed in
21 their career.

22 In my capacity as the President of
23 the Veterans Students' Organization at Brooklyn
24 College, I served the first wave of combat
25 veterans returning from Iraq. I observed Marines,

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2 Sailors and Soldiers suffering from post-traumatic
3 stress disorder and in need of services due to
4 their experiences. I was grateful to be a part of
5 their recovery.

6 Aside from veterans, I want to just
7 highlight one thing because we always say
8 veterans. But, aside from veterans at the City
9 University of New York, there are many reservists
10 who are constantly going in and out of the combat
11 zone and who are just hidden. They're hidden
12 clients. No one really realizes they're there
13 unless they identify themselves as being in the
14 military.

15 But, apart from all of that, I just
16 want to urge all of you to support the City
17 University of New York in their visionary efforts
18 to provide services to veteran students and to
19 give back to these students the fitting education
20 that they deserve. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: Thank you
22 all for your testimony. I mean, I said at the
23 beginning that CUNY really is at the forefront in
24 providing services for veterans. A couple of
25 questions. But first, let me make a comment.

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2 And, I know that in your testimony, you know,
3 you've asked for funding. And, it's always been
4 this Committee that has tried, tried to get that
5 funding. And, I know and I can speak for my
6 colleagues on this Committee, we have been very
7 disappointed and not only my colleagues on the
8 City Council, but also the Mayor, that the people
9 who go and serve abroad put their lives on the
10 line and then, come back and it's almost like
11 they're forgotten. It really is a disgrace of
12 this country. And, that has to stop. And, I know
13 you're doing the best you can with the funding
14 that you have. But, we need to do more for you.
15 There's no question.

16 One of the things that comes, you
17 know, jumps up at me is I know you're doing a
18 great job with the resources that you have. But,
19 how does the veteran find out that these services
20 are available? You know, what's the mechanism by
21 which you're really doing the outreach? And, how
22 does somebody, you know, plug into this?

23 WILFRED COTTO: And, that's a great
24 question. And, something that we constantly
25 struggle with 'cause that's the outreach piece.

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2 And so, I want to refer first to the website
3 because it reaches veterans. It reaches active
4 duty members far and wide. I take a number of
5 inquiries from individuals stationed overseas,
6 getting ready to separate and planning to return
7 back to New York City asking about, you know, what
8 do I do first. Who do I contact? How do I apply?
9 And, when I get there, how do I file my benefits
10 and those kind of things. So, our efforts through
11 technology are really catching on and the more the
12 word gets out and the more that these individuals
13 speak to each other, the better it is for us
14 'cause we're really going to, you know, receive a
15 lot of them coming back that way.

16 Our college fairs are definitely
17 driven at that population that is returning back.
18 We have leads that we collect from post and pre-
19 deployment briefs that we go to at Fort Totten and
20 Fort Hamilton that give us leads on individuals
21 and when they are expected to separate from
22 service. And, we communicate with them, e-mail,
23 you know, regular mail, any which way we can,
24 phone calls just to let them know of upcoming
25 events, encouraging them to become members of our

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2 VIP page so that they can get in our network, if
3 you would, of people that are getting information
4 on a frequent basis. So, those efforts are for
5 that outreach piece. We table a lot with our
6 partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs at
7 the State Veterans Affairs, with community-based
8 organizations. And so, we try to reach the
9 communities that way, too, with the Mayor's Office
10 of Veterans Affairs.

11 So, all of this is part of, you
12 know, trying to answer that question, which is a
13 big question. We can do more. Okay. And, we
14 need to do more. I believe that we're just
15 scratching the surface. But, you know, we've only
16 been at this a couple, three years now. And so,
17 you know, as we continue, we're really going to
18 put ourselves out there in a way, through our
19 promotion events, you know, newspapers, radio
20 spots, I mean, everything that we utilize in
21 combination will eventually get the word out.
22 But, I think the best way to get the word out is
23 through word of mouth and individuals telling each
24 other what's going on at CUNY.

25 GARRIE MOORE: I'd just like to add

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2 that, you know, one of the things we are doing,
3 we're very intentionally exposing CUNY to veterans
4 as potential students who know of other veterans
5 that need to be involved in our academic programs.
6 So, we intentionally talk about it. We expose the
7 Veterans Office on all of our campuses, in the
8 community and we believe by being intentional is
9 the best way that we can help our veterans to know
10 about our programs and services.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: You may not
12 be able to answer this question. And, I know it's
13 come up before in many of our hearings. What
14 cooperation do you get from Veterans Affairs? Is
15 there any, the Federal Department, you know, of
16 Veterans Affairs, the VA, do they communicate,
17 let's say, to you as there are so many reservists
18 coming back that may be available for, you know,
19 to enter college? Do you reach out to them?
20 What's been your experience? Because, again, this
21 issue has come up before and we see there's been a
22 lack of cooperation.

23 I mean, what you're describing is
24 great. But, it seems like the emphasis is on you
25 and the emphasis is on the veteran, maybe to get

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to that website or have a friend who's going to tell them about it. I always am concerned why isn't there more of a organized effort from the Federal government to say hey, you know, notify the local municipalities that here are X number of veterans returning from service. And, here's their, you know, contact information. You should be able to reach out to them to say what services are available. What's been your experience?

WILFRED COTTO: And, again, in this area, Council Member, you know, there's a confidentiality piece that, you know, we have to be careful with. They're not just going to give us a bunch of names with telephone numbers and e-mails and addresses and let us go at it. That would be great, okay, 'cause that would enhance my recruitment effort. But, you know, that's not going to happen.

So, but, I will say this, you know. The VA, over my last two years, I mean, has been a very strong partner in this. I mean, they have supported a lot of our events, I mean, all of our events. We've supported their events. They invite us to things that they're doing. If

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2 they're doing a mail out, they will send stuff for
3 us, you know, included in their mail out. If I
4 put something out via the internet or e-mail, they
5 send it to all their recipients and all their
6 network of veterans. So, without, you know,
7 compromising confidentiality and the Privacy Act,
8 I think that we've got a strong partnership in
9 outreaching with the VA and the New York State
10 Department of Veterans Affairs and the Mayor's
11 Office of Veterans Affairs. And, you know,
12 because, again, the confidentiality piece always
13 comes up. So, we're trying to do the best we can
14 with that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AVELLA: Well, I was
16 just, while you were speaking, talking to counsel
17 here. And, it would be interesting to find out
18 from the VA if that's the reason, because if it
19 is, why not just have a form when somebody's
20 recruited saying I waive the confidentiality part
21 when I'm coming back that my name and number can
22 be given to X number of organizations so that I
23 can know what services are going to be available.
24 So, we should follow up on that.

25 I see the Chair is here. So, I'll

1
2 turn over the Chair to Council Member Chair
3 Sanders.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: [Off mic]

5 WILFRED COTTO: Good afternoon.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: [Off mic]

7 trust. Let me raise one if that's the case. I'm
8 a vet, as you know well. And, I also went to
9 CUNY. I graduated Brooklyn College. And, I
10 worked in the Veterans Office while I was at CUNY.
11 But, refresh me. What are some of the challenges
12 that vets experience while attending college?

13 KINDA FORD: I'll be the first to
14 speak to that. As a 2006 graduate of Brooklyn
15 College and--

16 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: [Interposing]
17 I like it.

18 KINDA FORD: -- serving as the
19 President of the Veterans Students Organization
20 there, one of my biggest challenges coming out of
21 the military was, number one, my dependence on the
22 military, having realizing I had to take care of
23 myself. I didn't have any one to pay my life
24 insurance, health insurance, putting me in touch
25 with services. I needed childcare. I was a

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2 divorced mother of one. I had to work fulltime
3 because there was no one to help me. And, I was
4 trying to go to school fulltime so that I can get
5 a job paying about \$8 an hour. So, I felt like I
6 was being torn apart inside out. It was a very
7 difficult transition to make. It was a very
8 difficult transition to make.

9 TOM POPOWICH: I would just say
10 that what we see a lot, doing our outreach through
11 PROVE, is that a lot of student veterans feel a
12 certain sense of isolation until we can get them
13 engaged in the veteran community on their campus.
14 And, that's my biggest focus. And, indeed, most
15 of them, they get their information, maybe they
16 don't need the help. I'm just worried about the
17 one or two who don't come forward and engage in
18 the community because we don't know. And, it's
19 just a few. But, that's very important is having
20 a strong vets community.

21 WILFRED COTTO: Good afternoon,
22 Council Member. My name is Wilfred Cotto. I'm
23 the University Coordinator for Veterans Affairs,
24 United States Navy veteran. I understand you
25 served in the Marine Corps. Is that right? OO-

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Rah. Thank you for your service, sir.

You know, and I see a wide range. So, I have to focus on transition, readjustment needs, social, emotional, physical, psychological, having someone at the campus that they go to to get the guidance they need initially. You know, again, we're no longer in the military where we have that structure and that chain of command. So, that when they say go see the Sergeant Major, you know exactly who you need to go see. So, you know, it's good to say go see Kinda Ford or go see Tom Popowich at the Veterans Office. And, that vet helping vet contact and interaction is critical.

And so, the challenges that Kinda and Tom spoke about all, you know, pertain to this. But, you know, employment issues are also issues. Where do I live now that I'm back home is an issue. You know, if I have to work and go to school, who takes care of my kids is an issue. So, there's a number of different things that affect their availability to pursue higher education that we also need to be attentive to.

GARRIE MOORE: I'm Garrie Moore,

1
2 Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. One of the
3 major issues I think our veterans are facing is
4 fear. I mean, they don't know how, when they
5 enter the community, they are afraid because in
6 many instances, the community is not always
7 friendly to our veterans. So, I think, you know,
8 the City Council and I know you are, because you
9 have a Veterans Coordinator here at the Mayor's
10 Office and I know the intent is to embrace the
11 veterans, to make them feel part of the community
12 and get them access to CUNY and other services
13 that they need. So, one of the first things I
14 think we have to do is to engage the veteran even
15 before they get back to our community.

16 And, I know Wilfred and his team
17 are actively doing that by trying to create
18 opportunities for veterans to know about CUNY
19 through the website, through brochures. Wilfred
20 attends a number of national conferences, where he
21 is engaged in conversations with our veteran
22 officials. So, they will know, hey, we want the
23 veterans back into our academic institutions.

24 So, we're doing everything we can.
25 We need to build stronger partnerships with the

1
2 City, with the state, with the feds so that
3 veterans can overcome the fear of engaging in the
4 community.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Me push that
6 issue for a moment. I know that in a usual
7 separation there is a Sep Center, a Separation
8 Center, that returning people go to. They're not
9 veterans yet. They're about to separate from the
10 military. It might be a good idea to get them
11 then. To find a way to get into the Sep Center,
12 the Separation Centers to start having them come
13 up with some ideas.

14 I know that my days are one or two
15 years ago, however. But, there was a good person
16 who came there and spoke to us about what options
17 were available. And, it really helped me in my
18 life. I didn't even know how important it was.
19 It will be interesting navigating the waters
20 because that's a gray area of the service, when
21 you're just about out. It's not their main
22 concern. You're not a veteran yet. But, you are
23 certainly on your way out. They really don't know
24 what to do with you. So, they're killing time
25 until you're on the way.

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Have we ever tried to get to the

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Sep Centers?

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WILFRED COTTO: I refer to them as

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Processing Centers.

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CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Okay.

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WILFRED COTTO: But, I know exactly

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what you're talking about.

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CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I don't have

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a problem.

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WILFRED COTTO: Okay. But, yes, as

12

a matter of fact, my good friend, Mr. Richard

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Green, is the Administrative officer at the Naval

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Processing Center at Norfolk, Virginia. And, he

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makes a lot of referrals to me from Norfolk. Once

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he identifies that a person is coming back to New

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York City, he tells them about CUNY.

18

Now, that's just, again, scratching

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the surface. I need to really spread that far and

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wide throughout the military because you're

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absolutely right. That's where we're going to

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make the best bang for the buck. If we can crack

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that right there and be right there, you know,

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front and center as they're getting ready to come

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out, understanding that right now, all they're

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2 thinking about is going back home, you know. A
3 lot of information is passing through and it's
4 just passing through.

5

6 But, we plant the seed and we'll be
7 ready to receive them. And, we'll follow up when
8 they get here. And so, that, you know, the
9 objective is to really hit that processing process
10 early on and be embedded in that so that when they
11 start talking about oh, I'm from New York. I'm
12 going back to New York City. And, I'm going to go
13 to college. Oh, well, you know what CUNY offers.

14

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: You may--
15 sir?

16

GARRIE MOORE: Also, in that
17 regard, we simply identify the importance of
18 reservists. And, we were in this coming semester,
19 we were going to outreach company commanders and
20 commands of the local commands to engage them,
21 because if we can get them won over to our side,
22 then we easily can access, you know, their
23 reservists.

24

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: In theory,
25 the COs, the company commanding officers, if
you're not going to stay in, in theory, they

1
2 should want you to do well when you're out. So,
3 that's a good process. You may find the people at
4 the Processing Centers more serious. I'm
5 remembering my own self where it became scary
6 coming out for the reasons that you were given.
7 That I knew what to do in Marine Corps. Now, how
8 the heck am I going to stay alive when I'm on the
9 streets. As a grunt, my skills were-- there
10 weren't too many places that wanted my set of
11 skills. None that would have me in this seat,
12 certainly. So, it was a scary situation. So, I
13 was more serious.

14 And, I would suggest to you that a
15 lot of people, you may in one sense get less
16 serious when you get to the streets because now,
17 you're here. You're full of excitement. All
18 kinds of things are going around. You mean to get
19 serious, but you have to go visit this, then here,
20 and, you know, you sooner or later, you say to
21 yourself, you'll get serious. But, that moment
22 may not be now.

23 The Processing Centers may, indeed,
24 be a place where you can get to people. Your
25 example of the Norfolk one, and that's probably a

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2 Naval Base--

3 WILFRED COTTO: Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: -- is just
5 one example. All of these branches have at least
6 four or five, at least four or five major--

7 WILFRED COTTO: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: -- Processing
9 Centers. So, if it can be cracked, we may be able
10 to do well there. Where does, here's an
11 indelicate question, a Marine Corps question, of
12 course. We're not known for our delicacy. Where
13 does the CUNY Veterans Centers-- where does your
14 money come from? Is it mostly federal?

15 GARRIE MOORE: We, as part of the
16 CUNY Compact Funding, we allocate X dollars to the
17 Veterans Office. The Veterans Office, which is
18 headed by Wilfred, you know, reports then through
19 me. And, as one of my primary goals was to create
20 such an office where we could give focus to
21 veterans. So, it's part of my budget. So, it's
22 part of the CUNY budget.

23 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: So, there is
24 no dedicated federal stream for this?

25 GARRIE MOORE: No, we don't have--

1
2 other than monies that are going to support the
3 veterans.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Um, hm.

5 GARRIE MOORE: Okay.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Um, hm.

7 GARRIE MOORE: All right.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Which is sad.

9 We, in the City Council, are exploring-- we're
10 going to explore new ways of aiding the veterans
11 in New York City. I believe that a task force is
12 being bounced around. I trust that you will put
13 yourselves forward as being some of the people who
14 needs to-- we need to reenvision the relationship
15 between the City Council and the veteran
16 community. And, I'm very serious about that. So,
17 I encourage us all to participate in it.

18 Oh, boy, here's a good one. You'll
19 like this one. What impact, if any, do you
20 believe that the free SUNY, CUNY tuition
21 legislation has had on your system?

22 GARRIE MOORE: A free?

23 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Yes, in days
24 gone by, there was free tuition.

25 GARRIE MOORE: Yes. That was

1
2 before my day. And, of course, there are very few
3 free things today. I believe that, you know, the
4 feds perhaps need to be more engaged. And, I
5 believe with the stimulus money, the stimulus
6 package, there is a piece that addresses veterans
7 support, wherein veterans and their spouses and
8 children will now receive some form of funding to
9 assist with tuition and educational activities.

10 The economy, as you know, has taken
11 a turn that has made it very difficult for
12 veterans to pay tuition, even with the regular GI
13 bill. They, you know, still have other expenses,
14 home expenses that they have to take care of. So,
15 if we had free tuition today, it would be
16 wonderful. But, that's not possible, obviously.
17 And, we could use more federal support, state
18 support and, of course, City support in order to
19 help our veterans be successful.

20 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Just a
21 friendly disagreement over the possibility of it,
22 having seen how Wall Street has been aided in an
23 enormous way and suddenly with money that I have
24 no idea where it has come from and I believe our
25 grandchildren will discover where it's coming

1
2 from. I believe that it is possible. I don't
3 believe it's the priority that we're facing right
4 now. I think that there are different priorities.
5 And, in the days to come, we will invite these, I
6 almost said Secretary of, the head of Veterans
7 Affairs at the federal level to come and speak to
8 us. See where things are.

9 GARRIE MOORE: Excellent.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Welcome him
11 to New York.

12 GARRIE MOORE: Very good.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Having said
14 that, are there any questions? How about you,
15 Council Member? All right. Since there are no
16 other questions, I'm going to thank you very much
17 for your participation.

18 GARRIE MOORE: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Thank you for
20 your responses.

21 GARRIE MOORE: Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: And, we'll
23 call up the next people. I knew there was a
24 reason why I always love someone else to name
25 these. I'll have you name them.

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2 FEMALE VOICE: Jason Ortiz. Dan
3 Rossi [phonetic]. Thomas Mulfal [phonetic]. And,
4 Orin Tacoma [phonetic]. Oronda [phonetic], sorry.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I thank you,
6 gentlemen. Good to see you all. Let's see. We
7 go seniority? Or, do we go age? Which way we
8 going? Sir.

9 JASON ORTIZ: I'm sorry. Good
10 morning. My name is Jason Ortiz. I am the
11 Program Director for New Era Veterans SRO in the
12 Bronx. It's 150-room veteran-specific SRO funded
13 through the Department of Homeless Services. As
14 well, I am the Director for the Bronx Veteran
15 Resource Center, which is facilitated through
16 CUNY. Okay.

17 The Bronx Veteran Resource Center's
18 obviously a one-stop shop, what you refer to as
19 getting the guys, and it was actually a fund
20 through the City Council's office for each
21 Borough. The Bronx has been facilitating New Era
22 Veterans for the last two years.

23 Presently now, there's anywhere
24 from 20 to 30 returning vets in Borden Avenue
25 shelter specifically. Younger vets, a different

1
2 kind of vet that's coming back. When we do
3 outreach, we always kind of tell people that I
4 think it's just maybe their age, when they kind of
5 go in, they may not have had the opportunities to
6 go to school, so that's why they went to service.
7 And, maybe the information is not kind of getting
8 to them in time, which you guys kind of agree to.
9 When we get them, they're already in the shelter;
10 24, 25, 26-year-old veterans, kind of lost, of
11 course, suffering from all types of ailments.

12 Through CUNY, and within the last
13 year, New Era Veterans has been able to assist
14 close to 105 single and veteran families to
15 reconnect with their educational goals through
16 CUNY. That is a big push that we do. New Era
17 Veterans, as a whole, does outreach to the
18 shelters, Veterans Affairs, local communities.
19 And, we're kind of the one-stop shop since we have
20 the Resource Center. So, we obviously focus on
21 housing. But, the next question is well, what
22 happened and why did you get here. Financial.
23 Education. Family reunification. And, these are
24 the things that we look at.

25 More recently, just within the last

1
2 two weeks, CUNY was able to extend its CUNY on
3 Wheels, which is actually a mobile school unit, to
4 our SRO. Within the last week, we've had, out of
5 our 150, 24 veterans sign up for GED and college
6 prep courses. You're looking at Vietnam veterans
7 that are signing up and wanting to go back to
8 college. That is, I think, it makes a statement
9 that they really want to take advantage of the
10 services that CUNY is providing. And, of course,
11 with continued support, I think that us, along
12 with CUNY, can do a lot more.

13 THOMAS MULFIELD: Good afternoon.

14 My name is Thomas Mulfield [phonetic]. I also was
15 a Director of New Era Veterans program. I
16 retired. But, I still work over 40 hours a week
17 at New Era Veterans. My heart and soul goes for
18 the veterans.

19 And, I'd just like to say I visited
20 CUNY and I spoke with Mr. Cotto. And, I know how
21 dedicated these gentlemen are and how much heart
22 they put in by what they do. Also, they have a
23 satellite, which would be La Guardia, who also has
24 a wonderful staff that tries to do everything they
25 can to bring forth an agenda to get people,

1
2 veterans, back into an educational process, where
3 they could help themselves.

4 The problem is, and it's been
5 stated again and again, the funding. The funding,
6 the funding, is so important. We, in the Bronx
7 Veterans Resource Center, I see close to 100, 150
8 veterans a month looking for home; looking for
9 employment; looking for educational goals.

10 Without a funding priority for the other-- we have
11 five boroughs, five sister boroughs that work with
12 us, just like we work with them, crossing lines,
13 helping Brooklyn, this would be Brooklyn. I'm in
14 the Bronx. We always talk. We always cross
15 lines. What can we do for the veterans, which is
16 so important. You got two wars raging. And,
17 there's really no end in sight. I wish. I wish
18 tomorrow it was over. But, that's not reality.

19 If we don't have the funding, the
20 boroughs, CUNY, La Guardia, and in company, what
21 are we going to do with the vets that come
22 knocking on our door? The City Council provided
23 us with a half million dollars last year to be
24 split between the boroughs. What is going on this
25 year? I can't believe that the budget can't put

1
2 aside another million dollars, 200,000, whatever
3 it breaks down to, to each borough as we had
4 originally. We had originally \$1 million. This
5 year it was cut in half. That curtailed me. I
6 had to retire from my job. Stop taking a paycheck
7 and work for free. But, that was my decision.
8 And, we have a lot of guys in here, in my
9 building, who are volunteering.

10 But, without proper payment, I
11 can't get staff out. I can't visit the soup
12 kitchens. I can't go to the churches and talk to
13 our vets. What's my alternative? What do I do
14 next?

15 ORONDA TACUMA: Good afternoon. My
16 name is Oronda Tacuma [phonetic]. I'm from Black
17 Veterans for Social Justice, the co-founder. Been
18 in existence for 30 years. And, some of the same
19 issues we speaking about today and we spoke about
20 before are the same issues we was dealing with 30
21 years ago.

22 And, there's a question of, someone
23 raised priority. And, the priorities supported by
24 where your finances are. And, over those 30
25 years, though, we've come from a storefront with

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no heat, etcetera, coming out of our pockets to finance the operation, still today, we find ourselves in the position of beggars. People who the society ask to go and defend democracy and freedom and all those good things. And, come back home. Some of those veterans in our area came back home with steel plates in their head, stomachs missing, limbs missing. But, they had bad paper. So, that was the reason that Black Vets came into existence.

And, today, we're dealing with the same issues about the priorities of this government in terms of its soldiers and its families and the communities in which they reside. And, even the communities where we come from is not a priority. That question of priority in our lives as veterans, as members of a community, is always the same thing. Like you mentioned, they had an emergency meeting to bail out Wall Street. They found trillions of dollars to give to Wall Street. And, the veterans, we dealing with veterans who are homeless. You understand that concept? I don't. Who are unemployed; veterans who lost their housing because they had multiple

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deployments.

And, we hear all the speeches, all the accolades and what veterans should get and what they earn and what we sacrifice. And, we know the story. But, when it comes down to opening up the pocketbook that tells you where a nation's priorities are, when it comes to veterans, not only do we not get the funds we need, but they get cut 50% in the midst of wars that this government is involved in. And, you asking other young people to get involved in that. For what reason? You know what I mean? And, you know, I'm, quite frankly, after 30 years of doing this work, and I'm proud of the work we do. And, I have relationship with veterans 'cause I understand veterans represents community.

And, if we look at the history of what veterans did when they came back and contributed to the society even when they came back, in spite of all those things. What they provided to this country in terms of leadership. And still, today, we're here begging. You know, we at a Veterans' Committee. And, we're telling you and you understand it. You're a veteran.

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2 But, we have to make the whole government and
3 society understand that. And, there's a lot of
4 reasons, ways to make people understand that
5 you're hurting and you're in pain.

6 And, you know, we go through this
7 process, this democratic process with committees.
8 We try to make it as plain as day that the
9 veterans need help. You promised us some help.
10 You supposed to have guaranteed that help. It's
11 not happening.

12 We talk about education. Before,
13 when you come home, first thing you're thinking
14 about is going home. You can listen to all these
15 heads in front of you telling you all this about
16 this, that and the other. But, you want to go
17 home. Once you get home, then you understand what
18 it means to be a veteran. You know what I mean?
19 Then, you have to find out how am I going to
20 survive. How am I going to navigate. How I'm
21 going to get my life in order. That's after you
22 out of the military and you in community. And,
23 you see there's no help for you. And, our answer,
24 of course, was organizing ourselves.

25 I graduated from CUNY, Brooklyn

1
2 College myself. That's when the college campuses
3 weren't these Ivy League kind of things where we
4 just go and we deal with books. There's a lot of
5 political activity going on on campus. And, a lot
6 of demands was made. A lot of these organizations
7 came together out of demand. And, veterans
8 organizing ourselves. Today, you know, no one's
9 listens to us because, I guess they feel we're not
10 organized or we're not saying the things properly
11 or we're not saying them forcefully enough that
12 this has to change. You know what I mean?

13 That if this latest venture they
14 have in the Middle East, you know, people when
15 they come from the war, just like Vietnam, there
16 was moral issues involved. A why I was there and
17 what I had to do and etcetera. And, a government
18 that lied to you and didn't bring you home and
19 don't support you. It's the same thing happen
20 today. So, before they get to education, people
21 got to get their mind right. You know what I
22 mean? They got to go home and get their mind
23 right, get their bearings right.

24 And, that's where community-based
25 veteran organizations come to play, 'cause we in

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2 the community. The boots on the ground is in the
3 community. We have trenches on foreign land.
4 We're in the trenches here domestically. We're
5 veterans of two wars, the foreign ones, as well as
6 our own domestic war with our own government that
7 can't find the resources to help us get to the
8 place where we can go to school and make decisions
9 for our family. What kind of government is that?
10 You know what I mean?

11 So, that's the question about
12 education for what. To support the same people
13 who are going to create the next war, that's going
14 to ask us to go fight and die, lose limbs for?
15 If, you know, if you going to treat us like pawns
16 or cannon fodder, then why should we, you know,
17 want to support your war, especially when it's an
18 unjust one. You know what I mean? Someone said
19 truth telling make cows of us all. We say so
20 poorly what we see so clearly. And, this is clear
21 to us, as veterans from our vantage point. But,
22 we can't seem to get the government and society to
23 understand that you need to support your veterans.
24 You know, and you need to find the money to do
25 that. The speeches are fine. You know, the

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2 accolades are fine. But, we need the resources.
3 You know what I mean? If you can give trillions
4 of dollars to the banking industry, then you can
5 find the money to give the veterans so that they
6 can get their lives back together and make the
7 contributions we have done in the past,
8 irrespective of being supported by this
9 government.

10 So, the question of education to us
11 is a question of survival, first; getting your
12 mind right, second; and then, deciding what your
13 strategy's going to be about education, family,
14 etcetera, and community, 'cause we have a
15 contribution to make to community in peace time,
16 when we home. The energy we use in war, we want
17 to use it to build our communities. And, we pay
18 taxes, as well. We're taxpayers. And, we
19 shouldn't have to come here feeling like we
20 begging the government to support its military
21 family, in the military as well as the veterans
22 outside the military.

23 So, that million dollars that we
24 originally had for the Veterans Centers, it was
25 supposed to be \$5 million. That makes sense. The

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2 million dollars and less makes no sense. It's no
3 commitment. It's hollowness. When you say that
4 and we should accept that. We should not accept
5 that. We should not have to come here with our
6 hats in our hands begging the government to
7 support us. We should be the priority. We should
8 be number one. And, everybody else need to lay
9 back.

10 And, that's our position on, you
11 know, the CUNY, the veterans groups that in the
12 community base. We have a different perspective
13 on things than community, than CUNY. And, our
14 boots are on the ground 24/7. You know what I
15 mean? Our community dealing with veterans and
16 their family 'cause they do have families. We
17 have families. You know what I mean? They need
18 to be supported. We need to be supported as we
19 supported this country and the government, now,
20 it's their turn to support us. And, we shouldn't
21 feel bad about asking for that. And, we shouldn't
22 be scared to ask for more than \$5 million. When I
23 see what's going down the block there, all the
24 money's going down there, \$5 million is a drop in
25 the bucket far as veterans concern. You know what

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2 I mean? I have a piece here in terms of the
3 budget. You know what I mean? All this is
4 military spending. This is veterans piece here.
5 You can get a copy of this, too, in terms of the
6 priorities in terms of how they dole out the money
7 in this country and the level where veterans fit
8 in there. So, I'm going to pass the mic to the
9 next.

10 DON ROSSI: Good afternoon. My
11 name is Dan Rossi. Councilman Sanders, Councilman
12 Fidler, Councilwoman James, I think my question
13 would have gone more to CUNY than to you. Coming
14 up is a very good opportunity for veterans to get
15 back to school. They're going to get a little
16 more allowance or housing and things. The
17 veterans that I'm always working with, many of
18 them are disabled vets. Many of them have
19 psychological problems, besides the physical.

20 If a veteran was to be able to go
21 back to school now and took advantage of what was
22 going on. But, a few months into it had a
23 relapse. And, some of the guys that I work with,
24 they could be seeing a doctor two, three times a
25 week. And, they had to stop going to school.

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2 And, the funding stopped. What would happen to
3 them? Does CUNY have some kind of a little, I
4 don't know, cushion where these men can absorb
5 that? Would they lose the semester? Would they
6 lose their funding for the six months? Would they
7 be homeless without that money? Do you follow
8 what I'm trying to say?

9 Many veterans, combat veterans,
10 when I came back from Vietnam, it took me about
11 six years before I could go sit in a classroom.
12 If a kid is coming back today and thinks he's
13 going to jump back in that classroom, it's not
14 going to happen. A year from now, Iraq is going
15 to come back to him. And, he's going to find
16 himself in a pretty tough spot. How does CUNY
17 help that young man or woman when he falls down?
18 Do you follow? I mean, he can end up in a
19 boarding shelter just by having to go to the VA
20 hospital for a month straight.

21 So, is there anything that they
22 have in place to like stop the clock for that
23 person so that they can pick up, you know, when
24 they feel better? Is that in place? Is there any
25 special counseling with CUNY?

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2 You know, I deal with these kids
3 all the time. And, they want to go back to
4 school. But, you know, when you talk real world
5 to them and they're going to see a physical
6 therapist or a psychiatrist once a week or once
7 every two weeks, how do you fit school into that
8 because the VA doesn't revolve around your
9 schedule. You revolve around their schedule. You
10 know, so, it could just blow up in their face.
11 And, if they're set back just once, they'll never
12 walk in a school again. You know, they'll be the
13 Vietnam veteran, 60 years old, who wants to go to
14 school. Well, he's going to school just to make a
15 few bucks and to socialize. That's what he's
16 going for. No career. Those options are gone,
17 you know.

18 And, we shouldn't have a repeat of
19 what happened to us when we came back. No one
20 opened any doors for me when I came back. I had
21 to kick the doors open myself. And, the doors are
22 open for these kids. But, maybe they might be
23 going in too quick. And, when that damn, that
24 door slams, it's going to slam for their whole
25 life. They're never going to-- they're going to

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2 remember what happened to them. And, it might be
3 worse sending them to school. You might want to
4 counsel them that maybe school isn't-- you're not
5 ready for it yet. And, you got to wait another
6 year 'til you adjust. Adjustment from combat's
7 tough. A veteran who sat in Fort Dix for two
8 years and a veteran who saw combat is two
9 different worlds. You got a college kid on one
10 side and you got someone who doesn't want to even
11 look at school on the other.

12 So, you know, maybe CUNY, whoever,
13 and, I'm sure they're doing a great job, can look
14 at that and maybe they can prevent something from
15 happening a year later to some poor kid, you know,
16 that's irreversible. That's about it.

17 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I'm assured
18 by CUNY in the back that they do have a means of
19 working with these veterans. You may avail
20 yourself to them after this hearing and find out
21 exactly what. Let's see, a lot has been-- you put
22 out a lot and I'm going to try to respond. First,
23 I'll put in a disclaimer. As you know well, if I
24 had the power that I wanted, we wouldn't have this
25 conversation. There'd be a whole different

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2 conversation we'd have. We're speaking of the
3 more that we can do instead of the less that we
4 will do. Whole different conversation.

5 I'm astounded by many things. I'm
6 astounded by, I was in a hearing, I think I was
7 with you, Council Member James, who has come to
8 the Committee. We were in a hearing with the
9 Department of Homeless Services where the
10 Commissioner said that 20 to 25% of the entire
11 homeless population were veterans. And, it was
12 what a powerful indictment. There's no better
13 indictment of a government than to have 20 to 25%
14 of your homeless as veterans. So, that was just
15 an incredible thing.

16 In the spirit of telling no lies
17 and claiming no easy victories, allow me to talk
18 to you of difficulties we have had that need that
19 we have to figure a way to resolve. I'll have
20 some of this online. And, I welcome you to have
21 the rest with me offline. So, we can really have
22 conversation.

23 Let's talk Veteran Resource Center.
24 As you know well, I have inherited that idea from
25 the Chair who was here before me. And, I have

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2 been told that there are-- it has not been as
3 victorious as any of us would like it to be. It
4 has done good things, but it hasn't done
5 everything that we need it to do. In fact, only
6 two of the four entities were able to make it to
7 the final cut for funding. We certainly have to
8 look at this on two different ways.

9 First, what are the governmental
10 restrictions? Why is it so difficult to figure
11 out their funding stream? Why is it so difficult
12 to get into the funding stream? I concede that a
13 half million is insufficient. But, if we can't
14 even access that, it makes it hard to defend it.
15 It makes it hard to defend that in this day and
16 age of cutbacks at City government level. So, I
17 want some feedback, some that you feel comfortable
18 giving here. I understand that absolutely we have
19 to figure out ways from the City down of cutting
20 red tape, of only having bureaucracy to help folk
21 and not seemingly to keep people out. But, from
22 your perspective, why have only two out of the
23 four entities that were "funded" come close to
24 getting their money, if not getting this?

25 ORONDA TACUMA: You can attribute

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2 that to the commitment of our organization because
3 they held us down financially, 'cause we didn't
4 get our money 'til this morning. The program ends
5 next month. Okay.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: When did you
7 complete your paperwork?

8 ORONDA TACUMA: We completed
9 paperwork back in November. And, that means that
10 since November 'til this morning, we had no
11 funding. And, the ADC carried that hoping that
12 this money would eventually come. And, it came
13 this morning. On June 30th, the program closes.
14 Maybe the other organizations didn't have that
15 ability to do that.

16 And then, I was told-- I got a pink
17 slip myself. So, and, we still worked. I don't
18 know where people get the idea the work wasn't
19 done or it wasn't up to par. We did the work.
20 Our reports speak to that. We went beyond and
21 above the call of duty as we always do. And, you
22 know, so it is the commitment of my organization
23 that allowed us to get to this point. They could
24 have dropped me months ago. You know what I mean?
25 And, the other people that's on there.

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So, it's a problem. The funding, it's still a question of priority. You know, they do this to other organizations. You know what I mean? Because maybe it's the political stuff they have to pay and they do. And, they don't feel we have that. But, I mean, it's always the same issue. The first go around, it's the same thing. Six months a new program. You know what I mean? We got the money. You know what I mean? So, and this time, they added another layer of government bureaucracy because City Hall did something and we had to pay for it. So, you know what I mean? So, I mean, that's been the issue.

But, the issue about servicing veterans was never been a question for us. Money or no, we did it before when we first started, with no money. You know what I mean? So, the money's important. But, the mission of helping veterans is not the question. Never was the question. And, that's why we're here advocating for more resources 'cause we have more work to do. You know what I mean? 'Cause there's more veterans not being serviced. So, it's not a question of us not stepping up to the bar,

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2 etcetera, is that those resources aren't available
3 in a timely fashion. There's only commitment that
4 allow us to get to this point. The other people
5 have to speak on that for themselves. But, I know
6 that's been a serious problem.

7 THOMAS MULFIELD: You know, I got
8 it right here. Again, gentlemen, ladies, how are
9 you. Glad to be here. I have a full report of
10 every month what we've done since November. We
11 also worked with no budget. We had no money.
12 I've been living out of pocket. I quit my job so
13 I could save the building money. Okay. I was
14 making a nice paycheck and now, I get \$125 a week
15 for the same amount of hours I put in doing the
16 same amount things I did. That's just one
17 article.

18 This is a 45-foot mobile medical
19 unit. This is staffed by doctors and nurses. We
20 don't have it going out in the boroughs anymore.
21 No money. No driver. No money. No nurses. No
22 doctors. No money. This used to go out every
23 week to each borough, see the veterans that had
24 some kind of, as everybody will attest, we went to
25 every borough. Any veteran that wasn't feeling

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2 ill, was feeling ill, or poorly, we took care of.
3 We made sure we got them to the hospital and took
4 care of their immediate needs. We also, on this
5 truck, took benefit information. We made sure
6 they got their benefits. It sits in our yard now
7 because we don't have any funding.

8 The City Council, if I can remember
9 just last year, was it, had a bit problem about
10 the funding and so on, which you all know. But,
11 what I can't understand is each of you Council
12 Members has a little something you take care of in
13 your district that assists you and assists the
14 community. Has any one of you, any one, ever
15 thought of helping a veteran program?

16 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: I actually
17 have one [off mic]

18 THOMAS MULFIELD: You just did. I
19 know. I read, I know, Mr. Sanders. I know all
20 about it. But, who else? Think about what I'm
21 saying.

22 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: [Off mic]

23 THOMAS MULFIELD: Nobody. Nobody--
24 I love you, too. I know. I know. I'm - -

25 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: But, not

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2 enough.

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THOMAS MULFIELD: Not enough.

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Where is the--

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CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: [crosstalk]

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THOMAS MULFIELD: -- 15,000 from

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this gentleman; 20,000, where's the money from the

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City. The City has never funded one program for

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veterans ever. Not one. Mr. Bloomberg sits on a

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mountain and he - - but, surely does that flag

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waving really good, you know. But, I never see

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him reach in his pocket yet. Who has, as we know,

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Miss James, as we know, the City Council's been

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the one that helped us, got us the money for the

15

last year.

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Now, we have a problem this year.

17

Where's the funding for this year? I would love

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you to tell me, Mr. Sanders, we're going to get

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you a million dollars, \$5 million. We need the

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funding to continue what we do. I see every month

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over 100, 150 veterans. I go to soup kitchens. I

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go to food lines. And, I drag them out the food

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lines. I get them the help they need. That's our

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commitment.

25

I could attest, too, for a Black

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2 Vets Social Justice, a wonderful job. And, they
3 will attest that we do a wonderful job. Whether
4 we're the only two that got funded, I don't know.
5 I really hate to say that there must be a problem
6 because I know Staten Island's full of soldiers.
7 I also know Black Vets Consortium. I know what
8 they do. I know they do the job. It's something
9 to do with something that I don't want to even
10 bring up, 'cause I just don't want to speculate,
11 whether they deserve their money or not. I'm sure
12 they do. But, I know we do. And, I know we need
13 the money yesterday.

14 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Just to be
15 "fair" to the City, just about every organization
16 is complaining of how slow the payments are. Just
17 about every community-based organization has-- is
18 this your understanding, too?

19 MALE VOICE: Yeah, but I wouldn't
20 make excuses for the City.

21 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: No, no, no.
22 No, I'm not trying to make excuses for anyone. I
23 just want to be clear. Everybody is complaining.
24 There is some bottlenecks that we just-- I don't
25 understand it. Don't want to understand it. We

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have to figure out how to break through that.
But, everybody is complaining. But, it seems, for
whatever reason, to hit us more. To hit us
harder. Our position is made harder to defend if-
- our position has just been made harder to defend
by not being able to get to the money in a timely
fashion and only two organizations that have been
able to. Perhaps the other two need to speak for
themselves.

THOMAS MULFIELD: Exactly.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: And, you
know, that's only fair, too. But, I have every
intention, here's where I'm coming from, I have
every intention on really sitting down and
redesigning this thing.

MALE VOICE: Good.

CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: We've got to
figure out how to. And, I agree. A half million
is not enough money. Is not enough money. And, I
have received certain commitments from the wing
downstairs, one of the two wings downstairs, the
Speaker's office, that they are willing and able
to see this thing through as we figure out some of
the blockages. I'm just interested in figuring

1
2 out the blockages now. And, I will speak offline
3 more than I will speak online on this issue.

4 Where we are is unacceptable. Where we're going
5 is even worse. Your immediate next steps will,
6 gentlemen, will be worse. But, we've got to get
7 through this to get to some place.

8 Our position, this hill cannot be
9 held. It can't be held. Is it because we're not
10 getting enough fire support? Is it because we
11 have been put into an impossible mission to begin
12 with? We're in a situation where we will either
13 accept a rout, where we just throw down everything
14 and just head for the hills? Or, we will figure
15 out an orderly retreat. And, we will retreat to
16 some place so we can figure out how to fight this
17 thing and win. I have no intention of losing.
18 Losing is a bad habit. You start losing, it just
19 sticks with you. Winning is a far better habit.
20 Sounds better. You feel better about it.

21 But, there's just more to the story
22 that online I'm not prepared to say. But, if you
23 ask me my position offline, be careful. I will
24 give it to you uncut, as Council Member Leroy
25 Comrie will be the first to tell you. Who's

1
2 peeking in and making sure that I don't mess up up
3 here. And, I appreciate that. Good to see you.

4 Are there any more comments that
5 you gentlemen have?

6 THOMAS MULFIELD: I'd like to give
7 you the reports that I have--

8 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Absolutely.

9 THOMAS MULFIELD: -- so you can
10 take a look at them. Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: All right.
12 The Sergeant at Arms back there will take them
13 from you. I will study them. He's very diligent.
14 I didn't want him grabbing you once you walked
15 this way. If there are no other comments that you
16 gentlemen will make, I will excuse this panel.
17 And, thank you very much. I'm going nowhere after
18 the end of this meeting. We can speak some more.

19 THOMAS MULFIELD: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON SANDERS: Semper Fi.
21 Since there are no other panelists and there are
22 no other questions, I hereby call this hearing
23 concluded. I conclude this hearing.

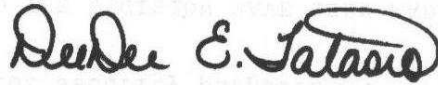
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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, DeeDee E. Tataseo certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "DeeDee E. Tataseo". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Date

July 29, 2009