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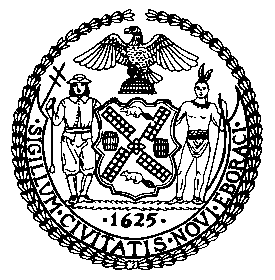
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**THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**COMMITTEE REPORT OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION**

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**COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE**

Honorable Diana Ayala, Chair

**April 4, 2022**

**Oversight: Update on the City’s Efforts to End Veterans’ Homelessness**

**Res. No. 21-2022:** By Council Members Dinowitz and Yeger

**TITLE:** Resolution reaffirming New York City's status as a Purple Heart City and calling on the State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign A.7961/S.2279, designating the State of New York a Purple Heart State

**Res. No. 41-2022:** By the Public Advocate (Mr. Williams) and Council Members Hanif, Yeger and Louis

**TITLE:** Resolution calling on Congress to pass, and the President to sign, legislation that allows service members, veterans and eligible surviving spouses to use the United States Department of Veteran Affairs home loans to purchase cooperative apartments

1. **INTRODUCTION**

On April 4, 2022, the Committee on Veterans, chaired by Council Member Robert Holden, jointly with the Committee on General Welfare, chaired by Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala, will hold an oversight hearing on the “*City’s Efforts to End Veterans’ Homelessness*.” The Committees will also hear Resolution No. 21 of 2022, sponsored by Council Member Eric Dinowitz, to reaffirm New York City's status as a Purple Heart City and calling on the State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign A.7961/S.2279, designating the State of New York a Purple Heart State. In addition, the Committees will hear Resolution No. 41 of 2022, sponsored by the Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, calling on Congress to pass, and the President to sign, legislation that allows service members, veterans and eligible surviving spouses to use the United States Department of Veteran Affairs home loans to purchase cooperative apartments.

Those invited to testify at this hearing include the New York City Department of Veterans’ Services (DVS), the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), veteran service organizations, supportive housing and homeless services providers, advocates, veterans and other interested parties.

1. **BACKGROUND**

Veterans experience a distinct set of challenges, both during service and upon their return, which present obstacles to address veteran homelessness.[[1]](#footnote-1) Among veterans, there are high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, and sexual trauma, which can lead to higher risks of homelessness.[[2]](#footnote-2) Additionally, many veterans are considered at risk of homelessness because of poverty, lack of support from family and friends, substance use or mental health issues.[[3]](#footnote-3)

According to recent estimates, on a single night in January 2019, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in New York State was 1,270.[[4]](#footnote-4) Of that total, an estimated 684 (or 54%) were in New York City.[[5]](#footnote-5) More than 90% (or 1,156) of veterans experiencing homelessness identified as male, 8.7% (or 110) identified as female, and 0.3% (or 4) identified as transgender.[[6]](#footnote-6)

***Ending Chronic Veteran Homelessness in NYC***

In a letter dated December 29, 2015, to the Mayor of New York City, the United States (U.S.) Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), along with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, notified New York City that it had effectively ended chronic homelessness among veterans.[[7]](#footnote-7) This declaration signified that all known veterans experiencing “chronic homelessness” (using HUD’s definition, described below) have either been housed or were on an immediate path to permanent housing, with the exception of those who had been offered housing but did not accept it.[[8]](#footnote-8) At the time of the announcement, there were five chronically homeless veterans who had not accepted the housing assistance available to them, with providers continuing to contact them to offer assistance.[[9]](#footnote-9)

HUD defines “chronic homelessness” as an individual with a disability who has been homeless for a period of at least one year or has experienced at least four separate episodes of homelessness in the past three years, totaling at least 12 months.[[10]](#footnote-10) This person must have been living in either a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter during this time.[[11]](#footnote-11) If an individual has been residing in an institutional care facility, including a jail, substance abuse or mental health treatment facility, hospital, or other similar facility, for fewer than 90 days and met all of the criteria listed above before entering that facility, that person can be defined as chronically homeless.[[12]](#footnote-12)

From January 2014 to December 2015, DHS placed 1,986 veterans into permanent housing.[[13]](#footnote-13) In 2015 alone, the City placed over 1,000 veterans into stable, permanent housing.[[14]](#footnote-14) In December 2015, there were 760 homeless veterans in New York City, including about 100 in federal VA-funded emergency residential and transitional housing beds and 60 in independently operated housing programs run by not-for-profits, down from 1,558 at the beginning of 2015.[[15]](#footnote-15) At the end of 2015, there were about 400 homeless veterans still in City DHS shelters without permanent housing secured and another 200 with plans to move out of the shelter within the next month.[[16]](#footnote-16)

At the time of the announcement declaring the end of chronic homelessness among veterans, the City stated it had put a process in place to rapidly identify, target and prioritize housing resources for veterans who are at risk of becoming chronically homeless in order to sustain the gains achieved.[[17]](#footnote-17) The letter from the federal government to the City stated, “We are confident that the infrastructure and systems you have built will ensure that any Veteran experiencing chronic homelessness in the City of New York will get the support they need to quickly obtain a permanent home,” implying that veteran chronic homelessness would not resurface in the future.[[18]](#footnote-18)

***Programs and Incentives to End Chronic Veteran Homelessness in NYC***

*Expanded Housing Stock for Low-Income Veterans*

After the federal government declared an end to chronic veteran homelessness in New York City in 2015, the Bill de Blasio Mayoral Administration continued to invest in services and programs to permanently house veterans.[[19]](#footnote-19) In 2016, Mayor Bill de Blasio established the Department of Veterans’ Services (DVS), the first City agency dedicated to serving veterans and their families, with one of its stated missions to house veterans experiencing homelessness.[[20]](#footnote-20) Over the eight years of the deBlasio administration, over 3,153 homeless veterans were placed into permanent housing, reducing the number of homeless veterans across the City by two-thirds.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In 2017, the City announced two initiatives that would help veterans, older adults, and low-income families to afford rent in New York City.[[22]](#footnote-22) The first initiative would increase the number of apartments in the Housing New York program by 10,000 apartment units, 500 which were to be dedicated specifically for veterans.[[23]](#footnote-23) The second initiative was an Elder Rent Assistance program funded by the City’s proposed Mansion tax that was to serve more than 25,000 older adults with monthly rental assistance.[[24]](#footnote-24) The initiative would ensure that a senior living on a Social Security check of $1350 per month would spend no more than $450 per month on rent.[[25]](#footnote-25) It appears these two initiatives were never implemented.[[26]](#footnote-26)

***The New York City Department of Veterans’ Services***

The New York City Department of Veterans’ Services (DVS) has a team of Veteran Peer Coordinators (VPCs) who provide direct, peer-to-peer assistance to homeless and at-risk veterans in shelters by helping to find affordable housing, identifying apartments Veterans are eligible for, providing transportation to and from apartment viewings, ensuring Veterans have rental subsidies and coordinating with interagency and housing partners for fast inspections.[[27]](#footnote-27) In Fiscal Year 2021, DVS secured placements for 117 housing-insecure Veterans through the Veteran Peer Coordinator (VPC) program.[[28]](#footnote-28)

DVS also works to increase the supply of housing available to homeless Veterans by finding brokers, property owners, and managers who are interested in housing homeless veterans.[[29]](#footnote-29) In addition, DVS provides aftercare assistance to ensure formerly homeless Veterans remain housed.[[30]](#footnote-30) DVS’ services include regular check-in calls and referrals to community partners.[[31]](#footnote-31) DVS also co-administers a rental subsidy program with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to help disconnected Veterans access Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Section 8 (a voucher program, which is described in detail later in this report).[[32]](#footnote-32)

*Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Continuum Program*

Over 30% of veterans in New York City are ineligible for vouchers with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and have been unable to access permanent housing, languishing for an average of over one year without being able to find permanent housing.[[33]](#footnote-33) Launched in 2017, the Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Continuum Program is a partnership with the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) that supports such disconnected veterans and their families to access permanent housing.[[34]](#footnote-34) Among the program’s applicants, 41% were female-identifying veterans or older adult veterans, according to DVS.[[35]](#footnote-35) Throughout the first year of the program, over 100 veterans and families who were otherwise ineligible for support services due to the length of time in military status or their discharge status were able to secure housing assistance.[[36]](#footnote-36)

*Rental Subsidies and Other Services*

Under the de Blasio Administration, for veterans who did not qualify for a HUD-VASH voucher, the City focused its outreach efforts targeting veterans with the City’s Special Exit and Prevention Supplement (SEPS) rental assistance program and with Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) Section 8 rental assistance vouchers.[[37]](#footnote-37) The SEPS program has since been replaced by the CityFHEPS program.[[38]](#footnote-38) The City additionally prioritized veteran referrals for City- and State-funded supportive housing.[[39]](#footnote-39) Supportive housing is permanent, affordable housing that is paired with onsite wraparound services.[[40]](#footnote-40)

*Veterans Housing Rental Incentives*

After the aforementioned 2015 announcement by the federal government to end chronic veteran homelessness in New York City, incentives were made to landlords, brokers and supportive housing providers to move additional veterans into permanent housing.[[41]](#footnote-41) They included the following:[[42]](#footnote-42)

* **15% Broker Bonus** (15% of the annual rent) for brokers who connect homeless veterans with LINC (a since-expired City voucher program) apartments or units that can be subsidized using HUD-VASH, HPD Section 8, and Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT) vouchers.
* **$1,000 Landlord Incentive** for every apartment and commercial single-room occupancy (SRO) with a one-year lease signed by a veteran experiencing homelessness.
* **$500 Room Rental Incentive** to landlords renting rooms through the LINC program for every one-year lease signed by a homeless veteran.
* **$1,000 Bonus to Supportive Housing Providers** for each community unit rented to a veteran with a HUD-VASH, HPD Section 8, or MRT voucher.
* **$2,000 Bonus to Supportive Housing Providers** for each community unit rented to a veteran with a LINC voucher.
* **Access to a Special Supplemental Assistance Fund** of up to $3,000 per year for landlords who house veterans, to cover potential damage to the apartment, as well as to assist with the payment of rental arrears, if needed.

***Public Response to HUD Designation***

According to the 2015 HUD designation, New York City “has achieved the milestone of effectively ending chronic veteran homelessness” and the City reports and maintains that it is “rapidly approaching ‘Functional Zero,’ where homeless veterans are rehoused within 90 days of entering the system.[[43]](#footnote-43) “Functional Zero” is a measurement that is defined by HUD as “when the number of veterans experiencing homelessness within a community is less than the average number of veterans being connected with permanent housing each month.”[[44]](#footnote-44) In 2014, the White House announced the Mayor’s Challenge, an initiative to end veteran homelessness, which New York City participated in. The criteria required the participating city to identify all veterans experiencing homelessness and swiftly move those in need into permanent housing. HUD notes that while Mayor’s Challenge criteria and “Functional Zero” differ, both ensure communities have a system in place to end veteran homelessness rather than only managing it.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Upon HUD’s declaration that New York City had ended chronic veteran homelessness, advocates expressed skepticism and cautioned that there are still veterans who require housing assistance.[[46]](#footnote-46) Direct service providers argued that the designation was a technicality based on the limited definition of chronically homeless and HUD’s point in time (PIT) estimate.[[47]](#footnote-47) The term “chronically homeless” excludes veterans who are housed in homeless shelters for under a year. When HUD declared an end to chronic veteran homelessness in New York City, there were still 760 veterans living in New York City homeless shelters, according to DHS estimates.[[48]](#footnote-48) In a December 2015 press release announcing the HUD designation, Mayor de Blasio’s Office said it had identified five chronically homeless veterans in the City who had rejected assistance.[[49]](#footnote-49) In her November 2015 testimony before the City Council, Coco Culhane, Director of the Veteran Advocacy Project, pushed back on the administration’s claims of progress, stating that it is “ludicrous” to propose that the City has identified all unhoused veterans.[[50]](#footnote-50) She charged that her client database has names of veterans experiencing homelessness, excluded from DHS’ count.[[51]](#footnote-51) Other advocates at the hearing stated that it is important to consider those veterans who remain invisible, including those in shelter for less than 12 months and those who may be at risk for homelessness in the near or long-term.[[52]](#footnote-52)

1. **ANALYSIS OF LEGISLATION**

Analysis of Resolution 21 of 2022

Resolution 21 of 2022 calls on the State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign A.7961/S.2279, designating the State of New York a Purple Heart State. The Purple Heart decoration is a solemn distinction and is presented to service members who have been wounded or killed while serving in the United States military. By adopting the Purple Heart designation on a statewide basis, New York State can take another critical step in ensuring our veterans are welcomed and respected.

Analysis of Resolution 41 of 2022

Resolution 41 of 2022 calls on the United States Congress to pass, and the President to sign, legislation that would allow service members, veterans and eligible surviving spouses to use the home loans backed by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs to purchase cooperatively owned apartments, or co-ops. Currently, the VA loans cannot be used to purchase co-ops, which can pose a significant problem for veterans and military members looking to become homeowners in large cities, such as New York, where co-ops often account for a sizable share of housing.

1. **CONCLUSION**

At today’s hearing, the Committees will receive an update from DVS and DHS about the progress towards solving veteran homelessness since the 2016 establishment of DVS and the 2015 HUD designation declaring an end to chronic veteran homelessness in New York City. The Committees also expect to hear from veterans and advocates on the current state of homelessness among veterans as well as receiving feedback on Resolution 21 of 2022 and Resolution 41 of 2022.

Res. No. 21

..Title

Resolution reaffirming New York City’s status as a Purple Heart City and calling on the State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign A.7961/S.2279, designating the State of New York a Purple Heart State.

..Body

By Council Members Dinowitz and Yeger

Whereas, According to the Military Order of the Purple Heart, an organization for combat wounded veterans, the Purple Heart Medal is the oldest and among the most venerated military decorations in present use; and

Whereas, The Purple Heart is awarded in the name of the President of the United States to those wounded or killed in combat by enemy action, or posthumously to their next of kin; and

Whereas, On August 7, 1782, during the Revolutionary War, General George Washington issued an order establishing a badge of distinction for meritorious action, which consisted of a heart made of purple cloth; and

Whereas, The award was notable because it was a way to honor brave soldiers in the lower ranks who fought under General Washington’s command for America’s independence at a time when only officers were eligible for decoration in European armies; and

Whereas, Although discontinued after the Revolutionary War, the decoration was reinstated by the Department of Defense in 1932; and

Whereas, Our nation's military leaders have awarded the Purple Heart to honor an estimated 1.8 million Americans who have been wounded in battle or killed in action; and

Whereas, New York City is home to 230,000 veterans, according to the New York City Department of Veteran Services; and

Whereas, In 2015, the New York City Council issued a proclamation declaring New York City a Purple Heart City; and

Whereas, S.2279, sponsored by Senator Daphne Jordan and its companion bill A.7961, sponsored by Assembly Member Jake Ashby, would designate the State of New York a Purple Heart State, recognizing the heroic sacrifices our nation’s soldiers have made in order to protect our country; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York reaffirms New York City’s status as a Purple Heart City and calls on the State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign A.7961/S.2279, designating the State of New York a Purple Heart State.

Session 12

AH

LS #6324/6980

02/16/2022

Session 11

EA

LS #18175

Res. #1838-2021

Res. No. 41

..Title

Resolution calling on Congress to pass, and the President to sign, legislation that allows service members, veterans and eligible surviving spouses to use the United States Department of Veteran Affairs home loans to purchase cooperative apartments.

..Body

By the Public Advocate (Mr. Williams) and Council Members Hanif, Yeger and Louis

Whereas, The United States Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) helps service members, veterans and eligible surviving spouses to become homeowners by offering a home loan; and

Whereas, Home loans offered by the VA, known as VA loans, are provided by private lenders such as banks and mortgage companies; and

Whereas, The VA guarantees a portion of the home loan, which enables the lender to provide favorable terms; and

Whereas, The New York Times published an article titled, “A Loan Program for Veterans Comes Wrapped in Red Tape”, on June 10, 2013, which identified obstacles to using the VA loan to purchase a condominium or cooperative apartment in New York; and

Whereas, The New York Times article highlights three challenges: 1) New York real estate firms have no experience with VA loans, 2) VA loans can only be used to purchase a condominium if the entire building applies to the VA for approval and 3) cooperative buildings are excluded from the VA loan program; and

Whereas, According to the National Association of Housing Cooperatives, more than 1.2 million families in the United States live in homes owned and operated through a cooperative association and most of these units are located in major urban areas such as Chicago, San Francisco and New York City; and

Whereas, Cooperative units are often a less expensive housing option when compared to condominium units or single-family houses; and

Whereas, Veterans seeking to find a home in New York City or other major urban areas should have similar home buying support as veterans who purchase homes in suburban or rural areas; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on Congress to pass, and the President to sign, legislation that allows service members, veterans and eligible surviving spouses to use the United States Department of Veteran Affairs home loans to purchase cooperative apartments.

Session 12

NLB

LS 1107

12/30/21

Session 11

JLC

LS# 6273

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4. U.S. Dep’t of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, at 58 (January 2020), *available at* <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. New York State Division of Veterans’ Services, *Report on Veteran Homelessness in New York State*, at 9 (June 30, 2020), *available at* <https://veterans.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2020-0_veteranhomelessnessnys_report_final.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Id*. at 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Letter to NYC Mayor Bill DeBlasio from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, (Dec. 29, 2015) *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2015/NYC_Confirmation_Chronic_Milestone.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Office of the Mayor, Press Release, *Federal Government Announces New York City Has Ended Chronic Veteran Homelessness* (Dec. 30, 2015), *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/984-15/federal-government-new-york-city-has-ended-chronic-veteran-homelessness>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 24 CFR § 578.3 “Definitions” (2021), *available at* <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2021-title24-vol3/pdf/CFR-2021-title24-vol3-sec578-3.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Office of the Mayor, Press Release, *Federal Government Announces New York City Has Ended Chronic Veteran Homelessness*, (Dec. 30, 2015) *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/984-15/federal-government-new-york-city-has-ended-chronic-veteran-homelessness>. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Letter to NYC Mayor Bill DeBlasio from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (Dec. 29, 2015), *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2015/NYC_Confirmation_Chronic_Milestone.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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23. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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26. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. N.Y.C. Dep’t of Veterans’ Services, *Initiatives: Ending Chronic Veteran Homelessness*, *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/initiatives/ending-chronic-veteran-homelessness.page>. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. New York City Mayor’s Office of Operations, *Mayor’s Management Report*, at 253 (Sept. 2021), *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2021/2021_mmr.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Id.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. NYC Dep’t of Veterans’ Services (DVS), *Ending Chronic Veteran Homelessness*, *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/initiatives/ending-chronic-veteran-homelessness.page>. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
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37. The City of New York, Mayor Bill De Blasio, *Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City*, (Feb. 2017) *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/turning-the-tide-on-homelessness.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. NYC Dep’t of Homeless Services (DHS), *Veteran Housing Rental Incentives*, *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/outreach/veteran-incentives.page>. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Note: CityFHEPS has replaced the LINC, SEPS, and CITYFEPS rental assistance programs.  The de Blasio Administration streamlined these programs into one to make processes administratively easier for clients, landlords and DSS. *See* <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cityfheps.page>. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
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44. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Jillian Jorgensen, *De Blasio Touts End to Chronic Veteran Homelessness in New York City,* The Observer(Dec. 30, 2015), *available at* <https://observer.com/2015/12/de-blasio-touts-end-to-chronic-veteran-homelessness-in-new-york-city/> [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress 2011-2021 PIT Veteran Counts by CoC*, *available at* <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/xls/2011-2021-PIT-Veteran-Counts-by-CoC.xlsx> [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
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50. Ryan Brady, *City to Hit Functional Zero on Veteran Homelessness,* Gotham Gazette, *available at* <https://www.gothamgazette.com/5986-city-set-to-hit-functional-zero-veteran-> [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
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